

"AS SOON KILL A MAN AS KILL A BOOK."

Thomas · Arthur · Jones.

What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.





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AN ISLE OF SURREY.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART,"
"UNDER ST. PAUL'S," "MIRACLE GOLD," ETC.

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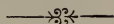
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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—AN INVITATION ACCEPTED	1
II.—THE FIRE AT RICHMOND	22
III.—HOW WILLIAM GODDARD CHANGED HIS NAME	46
IV.—AT PLAY	68
V.—THE POSTMAN'S HAIL	86
VI.—PRIVATE THEATRICALS	109
VII.—THE TOWPATH BY NIGHT	134
VIII.—A HOSTAGE AT CRAWFORD'S HOUSE	164
IX.—CRAWFORD SELLS A PATENT	181
X.—WILLIAM CRAWFORD'S NIGHTMARE	197
XI.—"MAN OVERBOARD!"	216
XII.—REWARD FOR A LIFE	233

AN ISLE OF SURREY.

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CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION ACCEPTED.

“AND so,” said Alfred Layard to Hetty the evening of the day little Freddie, now in bed, had made his first visit to the island, “you have absolutely spoken to this Alexander Selkirk. Tell me all about it.”

She began, and told him how she went up to her own room and saw Bramwell and the boy in the yard on the island, and how Freddie’s cry had betrayed her presence, and in the confusion at being found out she had consented to let their youngster go to play with the other youngster.

“You are not annoyed with me, Alfred, for allowing him, are you?” she asked in some suspense. The little fellow had never before been so long from under her charge.

“Annoyed? Not I. What should I be annoyed at, so long as the people are all right, and there is no danger of Freddie tumbling into the water?”

“O, there is no danger whatever. A wall runs all round the yard, and Mr. Bramwell was in and out all day looking after the boys.”

“How did Freddie get across? Swam?”

“Don’t be absurd, Alfred.” She knew very well her brother did not ask her seriously if the child had swum across the waters of Crawford’s Bay. And she knew equally well that he was not reproaching her for letting the boy cross the water. At an ordinary time she would have passed

by such a question from him in silence, disregarded, but there lingered in her mind a vague feeling that she stood on her defence about the expedition of the morning, and she felt timid under anything like levity. "No ; when we got down and out by the back door to the wharf we saw Mr. Bramwell pulling a great long floating thing made of timber through the water. He pushed this over to where we stood. It reached across the water. He told us he had another of the same kind on the canal side of the island."

"I know. A floating stage."

"I daresay that is what they call it. I should call it a floating bridge. Well, he walked across this and took little Freddie in his arms and carried him over. I was a good deal frightened, for the thing rocked horribly, but he told me there was no danger."

“Of course, there was no danger while the child was carried by a careful man. We had two of these stages at the works, but we had to get rid of them, for the men were always either going out for drink or getting drink brought in for them.”

“And, do you know, Freddie did not cry or seem a bit afraid of the water.”

“Hetty, take my word for it that from what you tell me there is the making of a great naval hero in that boy of ours.”

“I wish you would try to be sensible for a while.”

“I think I shall call him from this date Frederick Nelson Layard.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Alfred.”

“Or Frederick Cochrane Layard.”

“O, don’t, please, Alfred.”

“It is well to be prepared for fame, and we should always take care that our children are prepared for fame; and what

more simple and inexpensive preparation can a man have for fame than to be suited, clothed, I may say, in a name becoming fame? Hetty, my dear, remind me in the morning to decide which of these names I shall finally adopt; it is a matter that admits of no delay. I would not think of calling him Frederick Drake Layard for all the world, because in the first place the name Drake in connection with water suggests a whole lot of frivolous jests, always an abomination to me; and in the second place, there was too much of the buccaneer about Drake. Hetty, don't forget to remind me of the matter in the morning. The boy wasn't sea-sick, I hope?"

The girl only sighed this time. She had now lost all sense of uneasiness about the part she had played in the affair of the morning.

"You know," he went on in a tone of

pleasant reverie, "I think something ought to be done with the surname too. It would be well to be ready at every point. All you have to do is to write in an *n*, and you have a distinctly nautical flavour. How do you like Frederick Nelson Cochrane Lan-yard? But there—there—my girl, don't answer me now. It is, you would naturally say, too important a question to be decided offhand. Think of the matter to-night. Sleep on the idea, my dear Hetty, and let me have your decision in the morning. If in the dead waste and middle of the night any difficulties which you think I could solve arise in your mind, do not fail to call me. I shall be happy to give you any assistance in my power."

"Are you out of breath, Alfred? I hope you are."

"No, but I am out of tea. Another cup, please, and let us dismiss business

from our minds. Let us unbend. It weakens the bow to keep it always bent. Tell me, what is this man, our next-door neighbour, like? I have a theory myself that he is a coiner."

"Well, if he is a coiner you must not think he uses much of his ill-gotten gold in buying clothes. He's dreadfully shabby. But, whatever else he may be, he is a gentleman."

"Good-looking, of course?"

"No, but remarkable-looking. When you see him you could never take him for a common man. He seems awfully clever."

"Well, as some philosopher, whose name has escaped me, says, we must take him as we find him, though I must say it seems to me that it would be very difficult to take him as we do not find him, or as we find him not. To be serious, Hetty——"

“O, thank goodness! at last!” cried the girl, with a sigh of relief, and raising her eyes in gratitude.

“If you don’t take great care,” he said, shaking a long thin forefinger at her, “you can’t tell what may happen. I am not the man to submit to bullying at your hands. What I was going to say when you threatened me is this, that while I have no objection to Freddie going over now and then to play with this boy——”

“He promised to go over again to-morrow,” interrupted Hetty.

“All right; let him go over to-morrow. But for two or three reasons he must not go over every day. This young— By the way, what’s his name?”

“Bramwell. The man told me he was his son, his only child.”

“Very good. This young Bramwell must come over, turn and turn about, and play

with Freddie here. In the first place, I think one of the up-stairs rooms is a safer place for these young shavers than the island, though there is a wall; and in the next place, this Bramwell is at work on coining, or whatever it is, all day, and can't be expected to look after two mischievous boys of their age. Of course you can't have the two of them here when we have Crawford; but that will not be for four weeks more. That reminds me: he said he should like to see Freddie. Did he ask afterwards for the boy?"

"No. You see, he was busy tidying, or rather untidying, his room all one day, and he was out a good deal of the time, and went away early in the morning."

"Just so. My sister, you are very quick with excuses for your hero, your Bayard."

"I still say what I said before."

"Naturally you do. Women always do

stick to what they say. They are the unprogressive sex. But we will let him go by. I confess, from the little I have heard of this Bramwell—solitary now no longer—I am interested in him. A man who has kept himself to himself for years must, if there ever was anything in him, have something to say worth listening to when he speaks. We are solitary enough ourselves, goodness knows. Who can tell but this Zimmermann may be induced to cross the Hellespont, or, to be more near the situation, cross over from his Negropont to the mainland? When you meet him to-morrow, say I should be very glad if he would come to us and have a chat and smoke a pipe.”

“I will, but I’m sure he doesn’t smoke.”

“Why are you sure of that, my sister?”

“Because he has quite an intellectual look.”

“Thank you, Hetty. Very neat indeed. I shall not forget that thrust for a while. Now ” (he raised his warning finger again and shook it at her with a look of portentous meaning) “mind, this is the second man you have fallen in love with during the past three days, and the horrible part of the matter is that both of them are married.”

Whatever might be forgotten next morning, one thing was sure to be recollected in Crawford’s House. It is a fact that Hetty did not remember to draw her brother’s attention to the change of name projected for Freddie the evening before. Nor, strange to say, did her brother revert to the contemplated alteration.

But what was remembered beyond all chance of forgetting was that Freddie had promised to go across to the island again to-day. If the father and aunt happened by any means to lose sight of the fact, they

were not allowed to remain a moment in doubt about it. The first thing the boy said when he opened his eyes was, "I'm to go to play with Frank again to-day, amn't I, Auntie Hetty?"

At breakfast he had most of the talk to himself, and all his talk was about Frank and the island, and the boat by which he had gone across, and Frank's father, who had given them both sugar on bread-and-butter, and the old barrow which was in the yard, and which served them with great fidelity as a cab, and a tramcar, and a steamboat, and a house, and a canal-boat, and a horse, and a great variety of other useful appliances and creatures.

"Are there wheels to that barrow?" asked the father as he got up to leave the house for the works.

"No, no wheels. But we play that there are."

“So much the better there are none. And now, my young friend,” said the father, catching up the boy and kissing him, “take care you do not fall out of that barrow and cut your nose, and take care you don’t hurt the other little boy ; for if you do you shall never, never, never go over to the island again. Remember that, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said Freddie, struggling out of his father’s arms in order to get on a chair and see through the kitchen window if the other little boy’s father was already coming to fetch him on that long narrow boat across those wide waters to the haven of joy, the old timber-yard beyond.

Alas ! the little boy’s father was not there, and to the young eyes the place looked desolate, forlorn.

“Will Frank’s father come soon, Mrs. Grainger?” asked Freddie, in a tone of despair.

“Of course he will. He’ll be here in a few minutes,” said that good woman, who knew absolutely nothing of Hetty’s promise of the previous afternoon, as she had left the house long before Freddie came back and the undertaking for another visit was given. But Mrs. Grainger was fond of children, and, if she had had any of her own, would have spoiled them beyond hope of reformation.

“Frank said he’d be up very early,” said the boy in pensive complaint.

“And very early he’ll be,” said Mrs. Grainger, as she polished the fender with resolute vigour. “He’ll be here, I warrant, before you have time to say Jack Robinson.”

The phrase which Mrs. Grainger used to indicate a very little while was new to the boy, and he took it literally, and murmured softly, in a voice that did not surmount the sound of Mrs. Grainger’s conflict with the

fender, "Jack Robinson, Jack Robinson, Jack Robinson!" and then, finding the soothsaying unfulfilled, he lapsed into a spiritless silence, keeping his eyes fixed on the point where he knew Bramwell must come round the corner of the yard-wall.

Presently he raised a great shout and clapped his hands, and, getting down from the chair on which he had been standing, tore, shouting through the house, to discover his Aunt Hetty, and tell her the joyful news and fetch his hat.

He found Hetty, and in quick haste the aunt and nephew were out on the little quay or wharf, and stretching towards them, drawn by Francis Bramwell, was the long, low, black floating stage.

Little Frank was not visible. His father had left him safe behind the wall of the yard. It would be unsafe to trust him on the edge of Crawford's Bay, and dangerous

to carry two boys of so young an age across that long, oscillating, crank raft.

Hetty stood at the edge of the water holding the boy in her arms.

“How do you do, Mrs. Layard?” said Bramwell, lifting his battered billycock hat as he landed. “I am indebted to your little nephew for your name.”

He spoke gravely, with an amelioration of the subdued and serious lines of his face that was almost a smile. During the past two or three days he had not only re-inherited the power of smiling, but had absolutely laughed more than once at some speech or action of his son’s, or when his thoughts took a pleasant turn about the boy. But he had been so long out of use in smiling or laughing that he could not yet exercise these powers except in connection with the child.

Hetty in some confusion said she was

very well, and thanked him. Freddie's summons had been sudden, and, at the moment, unexpected, so that she felt slightly embarrassed.

"I am sure," the man said, keeping his large, luminous, sphinx-like eyes on her, it is very good of you to allow your little fellow to come to play with mine. You do me a great kindness in lending him to me. I shall take the utmost care of him, I pledge you my word."

In these few seconds the girl had regained her self-possession, and said, with one of those bright sunny smiles of hers, in which golden light seemed to dance in her blue eyes, "Understand, I allow him to go as a favour."

"Undoubtedly," he said, bowing, and then looking at her with a faint gleam of surprise in his eyes.

"And you will repay favour for favour?"

“ If I can.”

“ Well, my brother is a very lonely, home-keeping man, who hardly ever has any one to see him, and he told me to ask you if you would do him the kindness of coming in this evening for a little while, as he would like to meet you, now that our young people are such friends. That is the favour I ask. I ask it for my brother’s sake. Will you come, please ?”

The man started, drew back, and looked around him half-scared. The notion of going into the house of another man had not crossed his mind for two years. The invitation sounded on his ears as though it were spoken in a language familiar to him in childhood, but which he had almost wholly forgotten. He had come across the water in order to secure a companion for his little son ; but that any one should think he would come across that water and speak

to people for an object of his own was startling, disconcerting, subversive of all he had held for a long time: since his arrival at the Ait.

Hetty saw that he hesitated, and, having no clue to his thoughts, fancied her invitation had not been pressing enough.

“You will promise?” she said, holding Freddie out to him. “You said you would do me a favour in return for the loan of the boy. You will not withdraw. It would really be a great kindness, for my brother is alone in the evenings except for me, and he seldom goes out.”

“But Mrs. Layard——” said the man, in discomposure and perplexity, as he took Freddie in his arms, and hardly knowing what he said.

“Ah!” said the girl, shaking her head, and pointing up to the unclouded sky, “she went when Freddie was a tiny little baby.”

“Dead?” whispered the man, as a spasm passed over his face.

“Yes, more than three years.”

“I beg your pardon. I am very stupid. I am afraid I have caused you pain. Believe me, I am extremely sorry.”

“No, no; you must not say anything more of that. But you will come?”

“It is strange,” said he in a tone of profound abstraction; “it is strange that the two little motherless boys should take such a liking to one another, and that both should come to this district—this place—at about the same time.”

He had forgotten the girl’s presence. Like most men who have lived long in solitude, he had contracted the habit of talking aloud to himself, and he was now unconscious that he had a listener.

“We may count on you?”

He awoke with a start: he did not know

exactly to what the question referred. He was aware that he had been keeping the girl waiting for an answer, and that she had asked him for a favour in return for the loan of a companion for his boy. He blurted out "Certainly," and was back on the Ait once more before he realised the nature of the promise he had made.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRE AT RICHMOND.

A MORE devoted husband was not in all Richmond than William Crawford. A more trusting and affectionate wife could not be found in all England than Ellen, his wife, whom in tones of great tenderness he always called Nellie. To her first husband, old Thomas Crawford, whom she had married in the zenith of her maiden beauty twenty-five years ago, when she was twenty-two, she had ever been Ellen. Her name in his mouth had always seemed cold and stately; at home she had always been Nellie. But the dignity of marriage, and of marriage with a man forty years older than herself, had elevated her into Mrs.

Crawford among outsiders and Ellen among her own relatives and in her own house.

Her husband, father and mother, and only brother had been dead some time before her present husband came to live next door to her at Singleton Terrace, Richmond. She was a confirmed invalid, and had been unable to move about freely for four years. She had always been the gentlest of the good, and rested quite resigned to her fate. She never repined, never grumbled, never murmured. Except while in the throes of pain, her face wore a placid look, which changed into a smile when any one spoke to her or came near her.

Her doctors had told her all along that her case was not beyond hope. They spoke of it generally as loss of nerve-power. In hundreds of such affections there had been complete cures, and in thousands partial

and important improvements. They traced her condition to a carriage accident, in which the horses ran away, and she had been heavily thrown, shortly after her marriage. The injury then received lay dormant until developed by the sudden and horrible death of her husband.

He was past eighty at the time, but hale and hearty. He ate a good breakfast on the day of his death, and had gone out to look at some new machinery a friend of his had got in a sawmill.

An hour after leaving his own door he was carried back over the threshold, a palpitating, bleeding mass, torn and ground and mangled out of all human shape. His coat had caught in the machinery, and he had been drawn in among the ruthless wheels and killed. His wife happened to be looking out of the dining-room window as the bearers came along the road and up

the front garden. Owing to brutal thoughtlessness, no one had been sent on to break the awful news to her. She rushed into the hall as the four men bearing the stretcher entered.

They had placed a cloak over the body. She knew by the face being covered that all was over.

“Is he dead?” she shrieked, and raised the cloak before any one could stay her. She saw the mangled horror which an hour ago had been sound and hearty and—whole.

Without a sound she sank to the floor in a swoon. When she recovered consciousness she could not stand without aid. The strength of her lower limbs was gone. A double blow had fallen on that house, and although people expressed and felt sorrow for the old man, and horror at his sudden and terrible death, all the tears

were for the lovely soft-mannered wife, who seemed to think less of herself than another woman of her own shadow.

After the awful death of her husband followed years of lonely widowhood, in which she was as helpless to get about as a little child. Then came this suave and low-voiced man to lodge next door. He made no advances to her whatever. To do anything of the kind would have been revolting. It would have been plain to the most credulous that he sought her money, and not herself. He was not even a friend. He did not affect to be on terms of intimacy with her. He comported himself as an acquaintance who had great interest in her and sympathised much with her in the unhappy condition of her health.

Later occurred the fire and the rescue. The cause of the fire had never been ascertained. It arose in the kitchen under Mrs.

Crawford's room, and in the back of the house. Because of her malady, the widow occupied a room on the first floor, the kitchen being a sunken storey.

At that time Mrs. Crawford had a companion—a widow also—who usually slept in the same room with the invalid, but who on the night of the fire was absent from the house. The companion went for a day and a night every month to visit her brother at Rochester. All the other nights the lady companion had been away the cook passed in her mistress's room. But at this time a change of the two servants, cook and housemaid, had just taken place, and both being strangers, Mrs. Crawford decided to have neither in her room that night; she resolved to sleep alone. Mrs. Farraday on her way to the station had met the next-door lodger and told him these facts, expressing a sincere hope that

Mrs. Crawford would pass a comfortable night, and adding that though the poor lady often found a great difficulty in going to sleep, once she went off she never woke till morning, and required no help in the night, but had some one in her room merely for companionship.

All this Mrs. Farraday told the sympathetic next-door lodger, who joined with her in the expression of a hope—nay, a conviction—that the invalid would pass a peaceful and untroubled night.

The sympathetic lodger next door was not, of course, then called William Crawford. He took that name when some months later he married the widow. He was not known by the name of John Ainsworth either. For a very simple and sufficient reason he wished to forget John Ainsworth. Philip Ray had sworn never to forget John Ainsworth, and had, more-

over, sworn to shoot John Ainsworth if ever they met.

John Ainsworth had as many names as a royal prince. He cared very little for names. He cared a great deal for pretty faces just for a while ; or, rather, he cared for pretty faces always, but liked change. Better even than pretty faces, he cared for money. The older he grew the more enamoured he became of money. When a man of spirit cares greatly for pretty faces, and still more greatly for money, what matters how people may call him so long as he may gaze on beauty and rattle guineas in his pocket ? One of the most useful qualities of a pretty face is that you can turn your back upon it when you are tired of it. One of the most delightful qualities of money is that you can, if you only know where to seek, always find men willing to gamble with you.

When John Ainsworth left Beechley suddenly and not alone three years ago he and the companions of his flight changed trains at Horsham. At the same time he altered his name. He became of his own free action, unchallenged by any one, Mr. George Hemphill. When he left the train and went on board the steamer for New York he described himself and his party as Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Plunkett and child. When he took steamer back to England he travelled alone as Mr. Walter Greystones.

Mrs. Crawford's sympathetic next-door lodger was known to her and to Richmond as Mr. William Goddard.

In Mrs. Crawford's house the only servants, the cook and housemaid, slept in a front top room.

At about four o'clock in the morning, after Mrs. Farraday's departure for Rochester, Mrs. Crawford was awakened by an

awful sense of suffocation. The room was full of smoke. She could see this by the night light. She called out as loudly as she was able, but there were two doors, three floors, and three pair of stairs between her and the maids. She rang the little handbell placed at the side of her bed by Mrs. Farraday before setting out for the train. The voice was very thin and weak, and the bell no better than a toy. The voice could be heard no further off than the next room and hall. The sound of the bell might reach the kitchen and the drawing-room overhead, no farther.

The smoke in the room increased. It had a thick, oppressive, oily taste and smell, something like the smell of paraffin. Mrs. Crawford was not aware of any paraffin being in the house. She had a horror of paraffin, and none could be in the house with her approval.

She lay in her bed perfectly helpless. It was awful to lie here awaiting the approach of death, seeing the great clouds of smoke rise thicker and thicker every minute, and know that soon insensibility would fall upon her, and then death.

If she could but get to the window and fling herself out, she might be maimed for the remainder of her days, still she would be almost certain to escape with life. But she could not move from that bed to save her life. Her arms were as strong and capable as ever; but her lower limbs were as much beyond her control as the limbs of the dead.

She had often pictured to herself the horrors of being buried alive. She had often fancied to herself the soul-distracting awakening in the tomb, the confined space, the damp cerecloths, the cold planks, the stifling air, the maddening certainty that

above were space and sunshine and warmth, the songs of birds and the voices of kindly people going blithely to and fro.

Her own situation was as bad, nay worse. In the tomb there would be no light to show the sombre robes of death gradually closing down upon her. There would be no danger of the fierce fiery agony of flame before all was over. There would be from the first no hope of deliverance.

Here she was helpless, and could see the smoke growing denser and denser every moment, the weight upon her chest increasing with every tumultuous inspiration. Around her head, across her brow, a band of burning hot metal seemed gradually tightening and bursting in upon her brain.

She could hear the sound of the flames flapping and beating in muffled distant riot below, and yet she could not move.

She had read once of a man buried up to the head in the sand of the seashore for scurvy, powerless to stir, and so left by his companions while they went away for an hour. Towards this miserable man presently glides a serpent out of some sedges above high-water mark. That situation had filled her mind with ineffable horror. Her case now was still more terrible, for there was no companion who might chance to return in time. Besides, until the last moment the man in the sand might hope the serpent would not strike, that the reptile was not hungry. Here the fire would strike infallibly; flames were always hungry, voracious, insatiable.

The oppression grew more suffocating. She was lying on her back, and she felt as though an intolerable mass of lead were crushing in her chest. The band across her forehead tightened, and she could not

persuade herself that the bone of her skull had not been driven in upon her beating brain. Her hands seemed as though they were swollen to ten times their size. She could no longer move her arms with ease.

At length she felt as if the inexorable hand of death had seized her throat and was squeezing and closing up her windpipe.

She kept her eyes fixed on the light. This was the only thing that told of life. She could see nothing else.

It was not a light now, but a blue blur upon the darkness. It faded to a patch of faintly luminous smoke. She closed her eyes for a moment to clear her sight. The motion of the lids pained her exquisitely, and made the red-hot band across her beating forehead burn more fiercely, more crushingly than ever into her brain.

With a groan she opened her eyes.

All was dark! The light had gone out, extinguished by the smoke.

She knew that where lights went out life soon followed. This light had illumined dimly the way to the tomb. This bed was her grave.

She summoned all her courage, and drew a long breath. She summoned all her strength, and uttered one cry:

“Help!”

There was a loud crash, a sound of breaking glass, a rush of fresh cool air. She fainted.

When she recovered consciousness she was out of the burning house, in her own garden, and standing by her was William Goddard, who had rescued her from the burning house.

That was the beginning of close acquaintance between the man and the widow. She regarded him as one who had delivered

her from death, and all Richmond and all the world who read an account of the fire looked upon him in the same way. There was no doubt in the mind of any one that had not this William Goddard crept along the ledge running round both houses and taken the helpless woman out of the burning house that night, she would never have seen the dawn of another day.

Before the fire had time to spread beyond the kitchen and Mrs. Crawford's room, help had arrived, and the maids were roused and taken to a place of safety.

When Mrs. Farraday came back she received nearly as great a shock as if she too had been in that threatened room the night before. She loved the gentle, kindly Mrs. Crawford as she loved no other living woman. Her first impulse was to fall on her knees and give thanks that her life had been spared. She kissed and embraced

the invalid, and vowed that not to see all the relatives in the world would she ever leave her dear friend alone again.

“Every one is too good to me,” said Mrs. Crawford, kissing the other woman, with tears in her eyes; “and, for all we know to the contrary, the terror of last night may have been designed by Heaven for my good only.”

“Your good only! How could such an awful fright and such awful suffering have been only for your good? You are not one who needs to be made pious by terror. You are a saint!”

“Hush! Do not say such a foolish thing, Mrs. Farraday. I am nothing of the kind. I am only weak clay. But I was not speaking of spiritual benefits, but of bodily.”

“Bodily benefits! Why, I wonder you did not die. If I had gone through what

you suffered last night I do believe I should lose the use of my reason."

"And, owing to the fright I got last night I have recovered the use of my limbs. Look!"

And she rose and walked across the room.

"Merciful Heavens!" cried the other.

"This is indeed a miracle!"

The house in which the fire had occurred was Mrs. Crawford's own property, so she did not leave it, but had the requisite repairs done while continuing to occupy it. The widow now no longer required a room on the first floor. She was able to go up and down stairs. She could not walk so fast or so far as before the day her husband was carried in dead, but for all the purposes of her household she was as efficient as ever. The very fact that she was obliged to walk more slowly than other women added a new gentleness,

a new charm to her graciousness. Her gratitude for deliverance from the fire and the thralldom of her wearying disease added a fresh softness to her smile and manner. It seemed as though youth had been restored to her. The whole world was beautiful to her, because it had been given back to her after she had made up her mind she should see it no more. All the people she met were her friends; for had not one of them snatched her from death, and restored her to the holy brotherhood of mankind?

And what more natural than that among all the brotherhood of mankind she should look with most favour and gratitude on the man who had risked his life for hers, and restored her again to intimacies with the sunshine and the birds and the flowers?

That surely was enough for one man to do for any mortal.

But this man had done more for her. He had performed a miracle, wrought a charm. Doctors might say it was the shock which had cured her. All she knew was that when she lay there in the throes of death she had been helpless, that she had been helpless for years ; that he came and snatched her from the choking deadly vapour, and that when she awoke to consciousness she was healed.

She had no more thought of love or marriage then than she had of wearing the Queen of England's crown.

But William Goddard had thoughts of marriage, and although he fancied he managed very skilfully to hide his designs, they were plain enough to Mrs. Farraday long before he did more than offer what might pass for considerate courtesies to Mrs. Crawford.

It was not without pain that Mrs. Craw-

ford found she had no longer any need of Mrs. Farraday. But the pain was more than compensated for by the invigorating knowledge that she who had been a helpless invalid was now able to look after her own house. It is doubtful if she would ever have been able to suggest the idea of her companion's leaving. But the other woman began by seeing that she was not wanted, and ended by feeling that she was in the way. Accordingly, she anticipated what she perceived to be inevitable, and dismissed herself. She was sincerely attached to the amiable woman with whom she had lived so long, and whom no one could know well without loving dearly. But she felt it would be an injustice for her to tarry longer; and besides, she had duties of her own to look after in Rochester, for her brother living there had just lost his wife, and had asked her to come to him and

keep house for him and look after his little children.

“If ever you have any need of me, you know where to send; and although I suppose I must consider myself as belonging to my brother, I will come to you for all the time I can. I hope and trust and pray that your health may never make you want any one in the house such as I have been. Who knows but you may soon find a more suitable *companion* than I could ever make.”

The other blushed like a girl, and said :

“You are very, very kind, and you must come to see me often. Rochester is not so far away.”

“No, not so far. I will come, you may be sure.”

They embraced and kissed and wept; and so these two good women parted with mutual love and respect.

By this time William Goddard's attentions had become unmistakable. Mrs. Crawford could not deny that something was going on between her and her hero, her rescuer, the quiet-mannered, low-voiced, kind-hearted man who lived next door.

Mrs. Crawford was as simple as a child. She had not married her first husband for love. She married him because he had asked her and had treated her with respectful admiration and with a kind of rough gallantry, and, above all, because her father had told her that if she did marry Thomas Crawford it would relieve him of dire distress and put him on the high road to fortune. But, alas! for him, although he was somewhat relieved by Crawford on his marriage with Ellen, he never touched fortune. There was nothing like buying the girl on Crawford's side or compulsion on the father's. The girl was heart-whole

and fancy free, and would have laid down her life for her father.

She had never, in the romantic sense of the phrase, loved her husband; but from the day she was married until he died he was the first of all men in her consideration and esteem. She did her duty by him to the utmost of her power without having any irksome feeling of duty. He was a good, kind, indulgent husband—a man who, although hard in business, was amiable and good-natured at home, and who had aroused her enthusiastic gratitude, not by what he gave her, but by the services he had willingly rendered her father.

We read little of such lives in books. No doubt the beauty and sacredness that inhabit them make writers loth to invade their holy peace.

CHAPTER III.

HOW WILLIAM GODDARD CHANGED HIS NAME.

THIS gentle woman, who had long since left youth behind her, was experiencing for the first time the influence of romantic love. She was in her forty-seventh year, a widow who had been a faithful and devoted wife, and yet her heart was the heart of a girl. The age of passion was passed. The fact that up to the time of her marriage she had had no sweetheart, had never once found her heart dwelling on any young man of her acquaintance, may prove that she was never capable of the passion of love. There was at present no passion in her soul. But the overpowering and self-annihilating sentiment of love filled her

now, and for the first time in her life she felt that she lived.

With her, as in all true love worthy of the name, she wished to get nothing; the desire, the insatiable desire, to give was paramount, with no rival feeling near its throne. There was no coquetry of concealment in her words or manner. When this man asked her to be his wife she took him tenderly by the hand and placed before him all the reasons why she was not worthy of him.

She was, she told him, older than he by many years. She was a widow. She had suffered long ill-health, was not now quite recovered, and had been cautioned by the doctors that her extraordinary respite from helplessness might be ended any moment. She could never hope to be an active woman again. She could not go about with him as his wife should. He was a

young man. A man of five-and-thirty was young enough to marry a girl thirty years younger than she was. He had told her he had found a wonderful plant in South America, a plant which would yield a fibre of inestimable value, a fibre that one day might be expected to supersede cotton and wool. He had told her that as soon as he had secured his patent and got up a company he should be one of the richest men in England, in the world. Why should he, whose star was rising, link himself to her, whose star was sinking fast, who could not hope to live very long, and who must not expect that even the short span allowed to her would be unbroken by a return of infirmity and helplessness? If he wanted money to carry out his great scheme, if he wanted not to share the harvest of his discovery with strangers, she was not without means, and every penny

she could command was most heartily and humbly at his service.

He listened to her without any show of impatience, without a single interruption. When she had done he went on as though she had said nothing.

“I have everything on earth I want but one, and that one is more important to my happiness than all the rest put together. I want you for my wife. Will you marry me, Nellie?”

She smiled, and gazed at him out of eyes that told him he was unspeakably dear to her. “If you will have me you may,” she said, and smiled again. Her husband had never in all their joint lives called her anything but Ellen. It touched her tender and confiding heart to be, as it were, drawn by that dear and familiar form of her name into the heart and nature of this man.

"I must and will," he said, and kissed her.

"If you care for me," she said, taking one of his hands in both her own, "I am yours to take by reason of my love for you, and by reason of your having restored my life when I had given it up. When I gave it up it was no longer mine. It became yours when you gave it back to me. What is left of it is yours, and everything else I have. Even my very name must be yours if you claim me."

"I do claim you, and no power on earth shall take you from me."

"Or you from me?"

"Or me from you, I swear."

He kissed her again. That was the betrothal.

There was nothing violent in the scene. Except for the two kisses and the beautiful light in the eyes of the woman and the

clasping hands; any one seeing it and hearing nothing would have had no reason to suspect that it was a love scene. He was calm, firm, persistent, grave. He did not smile once. He indulged in no heroics, no extravagances, no transports. She admired him all the more for this. Anything of the kind would have been out of place, shocking. She was no young girl, to be won by rhapsodies or carried away by transports. She knew that although her youth had left her all her good looks were not yet gone. But he never said a word about her beauty. He was too sensible, and too noble, and too chivalrous, she told herself, to think she, a woman of forty-seven and in weak health, could be pleased by flippant flattery.

They sat hand in hand for a while, she in a dream of contented happiness. To her this was not the aftermath of love

gathered off an autumn land ; it was the first growth, which had never come above the soil until now, because no sun had shone on the field before.

There came no let or hindrance in the course of William Goddard's wooing. He had been only a few months in Richmond, but during that time his conduct there had been above reproach. At first, it is true, he had not been a regular attendant at church on Sunday. He had gone now and then, but not every Sabbath. From the beginning of his love-making he never missed the forenoon, and often attended the evening, services. He kept much to himself, and made no friends. He was a strict teetotaller, and frequented no such profitless places as clubs or billiard-rooms. When people heard of the engagement between Mrs. Crawford and William Goddard they said she was a lucky woman, and

that her second husband would be even better, if such a thing were possible, than her first. If there had been in the whole town a rumour to his disadvantage it would have swelled into a howl, for those who knew the gentle widow felt a personal interest in her, a love for her, as though she had been a mother or sister.

When Mrs. Farraday went finally to take the head of her brother's (Edward Chatterton's) house at Rochester she naturally told him all the news of Richmond, of the fire, the rescue, the love-making, the engagement or understanding between the widow and the heroic next-door lodger. She told him everything she knew, and minutely described the two people and the two houses.

Her brother seemed interested. He was a florid, well-conditioned, good-humoured,

shrewd man of fifty, not averse from gossip in the evening when he sat in front of his own fire, with his legs stretched out before him, smoking his pipe.

“What is known of this man? You say he has been only a few months in Richmond?”

“That is all. I believe he has spent most of his life in South America. For a while he was in a gold mine, and he was for a while a farmer, I think.”

“And what brought him back to England? South America is a fine place—that is, parts of it—if you are any good and have an opening. What did he come back to England for? Has he made his fortune?”

“I don’t think he has made his fortune. He is not an old man, not even middle-aged. He is almost young—not more than thirty-five or so.”

"Then *why* did he come back, and what is he losing months of his time in England for—at his time of life, too, when he ought to be working his hardest?"

"I don't know exactly. I think he has found some plant in the llanos out of which he can make cloth, and has come over about starting a company and taking out a patent. He says the plant is more valuable than flax or wool or cotton."

"Or all together?"

"Yes, I think he said that, but I am not sure. I haven't a good memory for this sort of thing."

"Kitty?"

"Well?"

"I have a fixed idea that every man who wants to take out a patent and start a company, and is months about the job, is either a born idiot or a consummate rogue. I have a very poor

opinion of this Mr. Crawford Number Two."

"Good gracious, John! aren't you very hard on a man you never saw?"

He nodded his head gravely at the fire, but took no other notice of her question. He puffed at his pipe a minute in silence, blowing the smoke straight out in front of him, as if in pursuit of some design. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth with one hand, waved away the banks of smoke lying before him with the other, and turning round to her, said :

"And, Kitty, I should not be at all surprised to find that he set fire to the house and then rescued the fool of a woman for reasons best known to himself."

Mrs. Farraday started to her feet aghast.

"Do you know, John, that you are saying the most awful things a man could say? You horrify me!"

“I mean,” he went on, looking once more lazily into the fire, “that I think he set fire to the house and rescued the woman in order that he might have a claim upon her, and that he doesn’t care a —— for her, and that all he wants, or ever thought of, is her money.”

“John, you do not know the man, and it is shameful of you to say such things, and you could be put in prison for saying them; and then to think of your calling the dearest creature alive ‘that fool of a woman’ is worse than any libel you could speak or think of!”

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two strange servants who sleep in the top of the house ; and on the very night you are away, and the first night for years this elderly woman is sleeping alone, the house next door to which he lives takes fire ; the kitchen over which she sleeps takes fire, and there is a great smell of paraffin oil in the place, although no one knew of any being in the house. And lo and behold you ! when the woman is just dead, he comes, bursts in her window, and rescues her, and makes love to this well-off invalid woman—he who has come back to England at the age of thirty-five, without a fortune, and with a cock-and-bull story about a patent and a fibre.”

“Good-night. I will listen to no more such awful talk.”

“Good-night, Kitty ; yet, take my word for it, he set fire to that house.”

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marked, her brother did not know the man; nor, moreover, did he live at Richmond.

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When old Crawford made his will a couple of years before his death he did not wish to place any restraint upon her as to marriage after he had gone, except that she was to keep his name. He had made all his money himself; he had worked hard for it, allowing himself no luxuries and little comfort for the best part of life, and deferring marriage until he was well on in years and had given up active business. He had no child, no relative he knew of in the world. He would have welcomed a son with joy. Nothing would have pleased him more than to think that the name which he had raised up out of poverty into modest affluence

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"Well, is the retort charged?"

All this time the boy was working hard at filling an imaginary scoop with coal, and pouring the coal from it into imaginary retorts. Frank was sitting on the edge of the barrow watching him intently.

"O, yes. They're all charged now."

"Well, I must leave you for a little while. You will be good boys when I am away. Take care of yourselves."

"O, yes!"

"And, Freddie, will you teach Frank to be a good boy?"

"O, yes, I'll teach him that, too! But I must have a book."

"Must have a book? You don't mean to say you know how to read?"

"No, but the way to be a good boy is to sit down on a chair at a table and look at pictures in a book. I hate books. Frank, it's Noah's ark now and we're the beasts."

The man moved away, and entered the cottage. He felt elated to an extraordinary degree.

For more than two years he had been dwelling alone with blighting memories. Yesterday and to-day he was experiencing sensations. Something was now entering his life. Formerly everything had been going out, going out from a life already empty.

That day he had been confused and put out by so simple a thing as that girl's invitation to spend an hour in a house not a hundred yards from his own. It was the first invitation of the kind he had received since his voluntary exile from the world. The world had been dead to him. He had almost forgotten there was such a state of existence as that in which ordinary people live. All his own experience seemed no more real than the memory of a dream, out of which

the light and colour were fading slowly but surely.

The invitation to Crawford's House had for him made the fading half-forgotten world spring out of its dim retirement into light before his eyes. It suddenly forced upon his mind the fact that there were bright and happy people still moving about in the streets and fields. She, for instance, the girl who had spoken to him, was bright and seemed happy ; very bright and very happy, now that he recalled her face and words and manner.

There were thousands in the world as bright and happy as she. Thousands, nay, millions.

Were there millions in the world as bright and happy as she? Hardly ; for she was as bright a being as he had ever met in his life. No doubt he thought this because hers was the first sunny face of woman he

had seen for a long time. For a time, that looking back now seemed immemorial: he had been dwelling in the gloomy caverns of Pluto; the voice of his boy called him forth from the hideous bowels of the earth, and, lo! no sooner did he emerge from darkness than the first being he saw was this Hebe.

But stay! What was this she had said to him? He had been confused and dull-headed at the time. She had confused him by asking him to do her a favour. Of late he had not been asked by any one to grant a favour. He had lost all intercourse with gracious ways.

O, yes! he remembered now. She had invited him to go over and spend an hour with her brother. And what folly! he had promised. He must have been stupid when he told her he would go. Why, if he went, who would mind Frank? The child

could not be left in the cottage by himself.

In due time, Mrs. Grainger, whose services had been engaged for that day, called for young Freddie. Bramwell bore the boy along the stage and placed him gently in that good woman's arms. While crossing the bay he left Frank in the timber-yard ; but when he came back he took his own son in his arms and carried him into the cottage.



CHAPTER V.

THE POSTMAN'S HAIL.

WHAT had formerly been the dwelling of the foreman of Boland's Ait consisted of four rooms, all on the ground floor. It stood at the southern extremity of the islet, the end windows looking south, in the direction of Camberwell. There were three of these windows: one in what had been the kitchen, now used by Bramwell as a sitting-room, dining-room and study; another in what had been the sitting-room, now empty; and one in what had been and was a bedroom. The present study and the room now unfurnished ran right through the cottage, were oblong, and comparatively large. The room used as a bedroom was

small, being only half the depth of the cottage and the same width as the study and empty room, and only half the length. The other half of the length was occupied by what had been a bedroom, now used by Bramwell as a kitchen.

There was no passage in the house. The door from the study opened directly upon an open space lying between the cottage and the old sawmill. Out of the study a door opened into the unfurnished room, and from that one door opened into the kitchen, another into the bedroom. Thus the two larger rooms ran side by side from north to south, and the two smaller, each being half the size of one of the larger, lay at the western end.

Up to this time Bramwell had spent nearly all his waking hours in the study. Now and then he went into the yard, and there, concealed from observation, walked up and

down for exercise. Once in a month, perhaps, he left the islet to buy something he needed. Otherwise he lived in the study from month's end to month's end, retiring to the bedroom to rest, when sleep overcame him, far in the night.

This was the last day of May. The sun had risen in a cloudless sky, and shone out of a heaven of flameless blue from dawn to dusk.

When Bramwell entered the cottage with his boy in his arms it was getting late in the afternoon. The Layards did not breakfast early, and Hetty and the boy had dinner at three o'clock. It was to assist at that indispensable function that Freddie had been recalled from the timber-yard. Bramwell had not thought of dinner until Mrs. Grainger had summoned Freddie to his. Then the father was seized with sudden panic at his own forgetfulness, and the

possible peril to his son's life. He knew from books that young children should eat more frequently than grown-up people; but whether a child of his son's age should be fed every hour, or every two hours, or every half-hour, or every four, he could not decide. In the kitchen was an oil-stove which he had taught himself to manage. Mrs. Treleaven left everything ready for dinner on a small tray. All he had to do was to light his stove and wait half-an-hour, and dinner would be ready for him and the child. A tray stood on the kitchen table, and on the tray all things necessary for the meal, saving such as were awaiting the genial offices of the stove.

Mrs. Treleaven never carried that tray to the study. She had orders not to do so, lest she might reduce the papers on the table to irretrievable confusion.

There was the half-hour to wait, and

Bramwell, having ascertained by inquiry that the boy was in no immediate danger of death from hunger, cast about him to find something to do which would fill up the time and interest Frank, who was hot and tired after his harassing labours in the yard.

“It is fine to-day,” he thought, “but it will not be fine every day, all the year round. On the wet days, and in the winter, where are Frank and Freddie to play? In this room, of course?” He went into the empty one next his own. “Here they will be under cover, and will not interfere with my work. I can look in on them now and then, and in case they want me I shall be near at hand.”

“Frank,” said he aloud to the child, “I shall make this room into a play-room for you.”

“What’s a play-room?” asked the boy.

He had had no experience of any kind of life but that spent in poor lodgings.

“Where you and little Freddie can play if the weather is wet or cold.”

“And may we bring in our steamboat?” asked the boy anxiously.

“We shall see about that. You would like a ball to play with in this room and in the yard?”

“O, yes! I have a ball at home.”

“Frank, my boy, this is your home. You are to live here now. You are not going back.”

“But I want my ball, and I want mother.”

“You shall have a ball; but your mother is gone away for ever.”

“Will the ball be all red and blue?” His own had been dull white, unrelieved by colour.

“I think so,” said the father gravely,

and grateful for the suggestion contained in the boy's words. He had forgotten that splendid balls such as are never used in fives, or tennis, or cricket, or racket could be got in the toy-shops.

The boy was satisfied.

Then Bramwell took a brush and began sweeping the empty room with great vigour and determination, chatting all the while to the boy about the wonderful adventures encountered by Frank and Freddie that day in their many journeys by sea and land.

By the time the room was swept the dinner was ready, and Bramwell, who had learned to wait upon himself, carried in the tray, cleared away half the table of papers, spread the folded-up cloth, and the two sat down.

Moment by moment the father was waking up to a sense of his new position.

He felt already a great change in the conditions of his life. He was no longer free to read and muse all day long, eating his solitary meals when he pleased. He must now adopt some sort of regularity in his management. The hours of breakfast, dinner, and tea should be fixed; and it would be advisable to tell Mrs. Treleaven to bring all things necessary and advantageous for children. Mrs. Treleaven had a large family, and would know what was proper to be done.

When dinner was over, he gave Frank the run of the house, carried the tray back to the kitchen, and sat down in his chair to think.

Yes, he should have to work now in earnest. He would no longer dawdle away his time in fancying he was preparing for the beginning. He would begin at once. He should add to his income by his pen.

When he had more money than he needed years ago, he had always told himself that he would write a book—books. Now, perhaps, he could hardly spare time for so long an undertaking as a book. He should write articles, essays, poems, perhaps; anything to which he could turn his hand, and which would bring in money.

The change of name he had adopted two years ago would be convenient. He had then used it to obliterate his identity; he should now use it to establish a new identity. He had no practical experience of writing for magazines or newspapers, but he believed many men made good incomes by the pen of an occasional contributor. Of course, he could take no permanent appointment, even if one offered, for it would separate him from his boy.

The afternoon glided into evening. Philip Ray had been at the island every

night of late. He was coming again this evening.

Between the news of Ainsworth and the arrival of the boy he could not keep away. He was strangely excited and wild. Philip was the best fellow in the world, but very excitable—much too excitable. No doubt he would quiet down in time.

If it should chance Philip met a good, quiet, sensible girl, it would be well for him to marry. The sense of responsibility would steady him. He was one of those men to whom cares would be an advantage. Not cares, of course, in the sense of troubles. Heaven keep Philip from all such miseries ! but it would do Philip good to be obliged to share his confidences and his thoughts with a prudent woman whom he loved, and upon whose disinterested solicitude for his welfare he could rely.

Yes ; it would be well for Philip, dear,

good, unselfish Philip, to marry, even if he and his wife had to pinch and scrape on his small income.

Some one was drawing the stage across the canal. Here was Philip himself.

"I was just thinking of you, Philip," said Bramwell. "I want you to do something for me."

The other looked at him in blank astonishment. This was the first admission for two years made by Bramwell that anything could be done for him.

"What is it?"

He was almost afraid to speak lest he should make the other draw back. He would have done anything on earth for Frank—anything on earth except forgive John Ainsworth, otherwise William Goddard, otherwise William Crawford.

The *aliases* of Mrs. Crawford's husband

were known to neither of these men. These two *aliases* were unknown as *aliases* to any one in the world.

“You need not be afraid. It is not anything very dreadful or very difficult.”

“If it were impossible and infamous, I’d do it for you, Frank.”

“Fortunately it is neither. To-day that little boy came to play with Frank again, and his aunt asked me to go over to-night and chat for an hour with her brother. In a moment of thoughtlessness and confusion I promised to go. Of course I can’t, and I want you to walk round and apologise, and explain matters to the aunt and father of Freddie. You see, I would not like to seem rude or inconsiderate. I don’t know what I should do if they withdrew their leave from the coming over of their boy.”

“But why won’t you go?” asked Philip

eagerly. "It would do you all the good in the world."

"My dear Philip, I am astonished at you. Out of this place I have not gone into a house for two years."

"So much the more reason why you should go. I suppose you do not intend living the same life now as during those two years?"

"No. I intend making a great change in my manner of life. But I can't do it all at once, you know."

"But surely there is nothing so terrible in spending an hour with a neighbour. That would seem to me the very way of all others in which you might break the ice most easily. Do go."

"I can't, for two reasons."

"When a man says he has two reasons, one of them is always insincere. He advances it merely as a blind. The likelihood is that

both those he gives are insincere, and that he keeps back the real one. What are your two reasons for not going?" Ray did not say this in bitterness, but in supposed joy. It delighted him beyond measure to see how alert and bright Bramwell's mind had become already after only a few days' contact with the boy. In his inmost heart he had come to believe that his brother-in-law's emancipation from the Cimmerian gloom in which he had dwelt was at hand, and would be complete.

"Which reason would you like to have : my real or invented one? Or would you like both, in order that you may select?" asked Bramwell, with a look of faint amusement.

"Both," said Ray.

"In the first place, Frank can't be left alone."

"I'll stay here and see that he is all right ;

so that needn't keep you here. Number two?"

"Look at me; am I in visiting trim? and I have no better coat."

"You don't mean to say that *you* care what kind of a coat you wear. This is grossly absurd—pure imposture. It does not weigh the millionth of a grain in my mind. *You* care about your coat?"

"But they may. How can I tell that they are not accustomed to the finest cloth and the latest fashion?"

"And live in that ramshackle old house down that blind alley? O, yes! I am sure they are fearfully stuck-up people. Does the aunt take in washing or make up ladies' own materials? Ladies who look after their brothers' children generally wear blue spectacles or make up ladies' own materials, when they live in a place like Crawford's House."

“Besides, Philip, I'd rather not leave the child behind me. I feel I could not rest there a moment. I should be certain something had happened to him.”

“What did I tell you a moment ago about men with two reasons? You see I was right. It wasn't because you won't leave Frank alone, since my offer obviates that, and it wasn't because you aren't clothed in purple and fine linen. Your real reason for not going is a woman's reason—you won't go, because you won't go.”

“Well, let it stand at that, if you will.”

“But really, Frank, you must change all this.”

“I engage to reform, but you do not expect a revolution. You will call and apologise for me, Philip? I can't go, and I don't want to seem ungracious to them. You need only say that when I promised to see them this afternoon I completely forgot

that there would be no one here with the boy. Of course, I could not have foreseen your offer to stay with him."

Ray muttered and growled, but on the whole was well satisfied. Bramwell had not been at any time since he came to the islet so lively as this evening. If he progressed at this rate he would soon be as well as ever—ay, better than ever.

He said he would take the message round to Crawford's House.

As he was leaving the room Bramwell said gravely :

"Don't be unkind to little Freddie's aunt, even if she does make up ladies' own materials and wear glasses. All people have not their fate in their own hands."

"Pooh!" cried Ray scornfully, as he disappeared.

Bramwell got up and began pacing the room. Of old he used to sit and brood over

the past, when he could no longer busy himself with his papers and books. This evening he walked up and down and thought of the future.

“Now that I recall the girl to my mind, Miss Layard is very beautiful. I do wish Philip would get married. That would get all this murderous vengeance out of his head. A single man may be willing to risk his own neck to avenge a wrong; but a man with a wife whom he loved would think twice before handing himself over to the hangman, and leaving the woman he loved desolate.

“I do hope he will fall in love with this girl. I know his present contempt for the sex, and I know the source from which that contempt springs. But all women are not alike. I have known only my mother and my sister and another, and out of the three, two are the salt of the earth and the glory

of Heaven. A good woman is life's best gift, and there are a thousand good women for the one bad. It was my misfortune to— But let me not think of that.

“I know Philip would scout the idea of falling in love and marrying. Two facts now keep him from any chance of love or marriage. First, his revulsion from the whole sex because of the fault of one ; and, second, because he does not meet any young girl who might convert him to particular exemption from his general scorn.

“And yet, although I have had little opportunity of judging, for I saw this girl only twice, perhaps she is not exactly the kind of wife that would be best for him. She is bright and gay, and beautiful enough, in all conscience. What a brilliant picture she made at that window ! I seem to see her now more distinctly than I did at the time. There is such a thing as the collodion

of the eye. And now that I think of the day, of the time she brought down the little fellow to the brink of the bay and handed him to me, how charming she looked ! There was such colour in her face and hair, and such light in her eyes, and her voice is so clear and sympathetic ! Ah, there are many, many, many good women in the world who are beautiful, supremely beautiful also, and she, I am sure, is one of them !

“ But I fancy the wife for Philip ought to be more sedate. He is too excitable, and this Miss Layard is bright and quick. His excitement almost invariably takes a gloomy turn ; hers, I should fancy, a gay direction. They would be fire and tow to one another. He ought to marry a woman of calm and sober mind, and she a man of sad and melancholy disposition like—— ”

He did not finish the sentence, even

in his mind. He had almost said "like me."

"No, I don't think she would be the wife for him. But there! How calmly and solemnly I am disposing of the fate of two people! I had better do that thing which our race are so noted for doing well—mind my own business."

His meditations were broken in upon by a voice hailing the island from the tow-path.

"Boland's Ait, ahoy!" sang the voice.

Bramwell rose and left the cottage by the door from the study. Abroad it was growing dark. "Philip has been gone a long time," he thought. "But this cannot be he, for he knows how to come over."

In the dusk he saw a man on the opposite side of the canal, with a canvas bag thrown over his shoulder. The man wore a peaked cap, and was in uniform.

“A newspaper for you, Mr. Bramwell,” sang out the man.

Bramwell, in great surprise, hastened to the floating stage, and, seizing the chain, pulled the stage athwart the water.

He took the newspaper from the postman's hand. It was too dark to read the superscription.

He hastened back to the study, where the lamp was burning.

He examined the cover in the light of the lamp.

He could not recognise the writing. He had never seen it before.

He broke the cover and spread the paper out before him. It was a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*, dated that day.

On the front page a place was marked. It was in the column devoted to births, marriages, and deaths. The mark was against an item among the deaths.

With a shudder and a sick feeling of sinking, he read :

“On the 28th inst., at her residence, London, Kate, wife of Francis Mellor (*née* Ray), late of Greenfield, near Beechley, Sussex.”

He raised his head slowly from the table, threw himself into a chair, and burst into a passion of tears and sobs.



CHAPTER VI.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

WHILE the owner of Boland's Ait was weeping over the brief announcement of his wife's death in the newspaper, the owner of a house in Singleton Terrace, Richmond, was sitting in his wife's drawing-room in a comfortable easy-chair, reading a novel. Mrs. Crawford, in her invalid's wheeled chair, sat at the other side of the table, languidly looking over a newspaper.

Mr. Crawford was a model of domestic virtue. He spent most of his time in the house, and the greater part of the hours he was at home were passed in the society of his wife. He did not drink, or smoke, or swear, or indulge in any other vice—in

Richmond. As to gambling, or anything worse, the good people of the town would as soon think of hearing the rector accused of such practices. He went to church once on Sunday regularly; but made not the least claim to piety, not to say anything of godliness. The few claims that charity or religion had made upon his purse had been responded to with alacrity and modest gifts; but the most censorious could not accuse him of ostentation.

In fact there was a complete absence of anything approaching ostentation in the man. He seemed to care nothing for society, except the society of his elderly ailing wife. The conduct of the man was inexpressibly meritorious. He afforded many estimable matrons with an exemplar of what a good husband ought to be.

“*He* never goes out anywhere,” they said.
“He does not even want company at his

own house (though that is not only harmless, but advantageous), for the society of the woman he loves is enough for *him*. Of course, he has to go up to town every now and then to see the workmen who are preparing his wonderful machine for making cotton out of dock-leaves, or something of that kind ; but, then, that is only for a day, and when he returns does he come empty-handed ? Not he ! He always thinks of his wife even in the little while he is away, and brings her some pretty present to show his love. Ah, if every husband were only like *him* ! ”

Of course, an inventor who is taking out a patent and getting models of machinery made must often see the artificers employed, and before, as well as after, his marriage, Crawford ran up to London for one day in the week ; that is, he went up on the evening of one day, and returned in the morning of

the next. Indeed, it was not, when put together, quite a whole day of four-and-twenty hours; for he did not leave until late in the afternoon, and was back next morning.

Now, an inventor is known to be a dreadful bore, for he is always trying to explain how the machine works, and no woman that ever lived could take a particle of interest in machinery, or even understand how one cogwheel moves another, or how a leather band can make an iron wheel revolve. Crawford did not make his house odious with plans of his models and disquisitions on his plans. If you asked him a question he answered it in the most explicit and kindest manner possible, and said no more about the thing, but told you that the moment it was in working order you should come and see his model at work. The kindness of the man's manner almost made people think they understood him.

On the table between the husband and wife lay a lot of papers, but they had nothing to do with the great invention. They related to the Crawford property in the neighbourhood of the South London Canal. Some of them were in Mr. Blore's handwriting, some of them in Crawford's. Mrs. Crawford had, at her husband's request, been looking over them before taking up the newspaper. She had glanced at the sheets, and when her brief inspection was finished put them down, and, seeing him deeply absorbed in his book, said nothing, but took up the newspaper to look at it, so that he might not think she had been waiting for him.

At last his chapter was finished. He put away his book and glanced across the table. "Well, Nellie, isn't it very extraordinary these people were so backward in paying?"

"It is a little strange," she said with a gentle smile; "but you must not be disheartened by it. They are sure to pay next month." She took up the list of the tenants and ran her eyes over it, that he might not fancy she under-estimated his efforts and anxiety respecting the rents.

"I'll tell you what I think, Nellie. I fancy that, although we issued the circular about my collecting instead of Blore, and although I had full credentials with me, they did not believe they would be quite safe in paying me."

"But they knew you were my husband," she said softly, "did they not? Was not that enough for them? It is more than enough for me." There were infinite confidence and tenderness in her voice and look.

"Of course, dear. But they could not be certain of my identity. How were they to

be sure the man who called on them was the William Crawford of the notice. The man who called upon them might be an impostor, who obtained the credentials by fraud. Don't you see?"

"O, yes. That's it. Quite plainly they were afraid to pay you, lest there might be something wrong about you. Fancy something wrong about *you*, William!" and she leaned back in her chair and laughed with her eyes closed, as if the thought was too deliciously droll to be contemplated with open eyes. After a brief period of enjoying the absurdity of these people, she looked at her husband and said, "But I hope you are not angry with those people, William? They are mostly poor and ignorant."

"Angry with them! Good gracious, no! The only thing that put me out was that I could not bring the money home to you, dear."

“But I don’t want any money just now.”

“You never want anything for yourself, dear,” he said in a tone of affectionate admiration; “yet a little money would be very handy at present. We have only a few pounds at the bank.”

“But we don’t want more than pocket-money until next month. There is nothing of any consequence to pay; the monthly bills have been all settled as usual.” It was a great comfort to her to feel that he need not bother himself about anything so insignificant as money.

“Yes, but——” and he paused, and a look of pain and perplexity came over his face. He leaned his elbow on the table and his head upon his hand.

For a moment there was no word spoken, but a dull, heavy, low, continuous noise filled the room.

The noise ceased, and then her infinitely

sympathetic voice said, "Dear, what is it?"

She was at his side. She had wheeled her invalid's chair round to him and had taken his hand in hers.

"Those workmen," he said. "They have swallowed up all I had." He did not take down his hand. He sighed heavily.

"But you are not grieving about that? It will all come back a hundredfold one day."

"Ay," he said in a tone of oppression and care, "a thousandfold—ten thousandfold. But there is the present——" He paused.

Suddenly a light broke in upon her.

"O," she cried, "how stupid I was not to guess! Why did you not speak out at once? William, dear, excuse me for not guessing. You will pardon me, dear, won't you, for not seeing what depressed you? If you want money, and there is none at the bank, why did you not sell out Consols?"

Mr. Brereton told me that all my Consols were as much my own as the income of the property, since they are my savings."

"No, no! I could not think of doing such a thing as take your savings."

"But yes, William dear, yes. For my sake sell out whatever you want. Why not? They are not mine. They became yours on our marriage, dear. Why did you not sell out?"

"No, they were yours, and are yours. There is a new law."

"Then it is a bad law. Take down your hand and look at me and say you will sell what you want to-morrow. Do it to oblige me—for my sake. I cannot bear to see you in this state. I'll sign anything this foolish law obliges me to sign. If they are mine I surely can give them to you. You must take what you want if you won't take all. If they are mine I surely can give them to

my husband as well as to any other person. If you do not consent to take what you want, I'll sell all out and give you the money."

She was pleading for the highest favour he could do her—to let her help him.

"No," he said in a tone of authority, "I will not allow you to do *that*."

"Well, take what you want. How much do you want?"

"Two hundred would be enough. But I can't—I can't."

"I'll write to Mr. Brereton to-morrow and ask him to sell out two hundred for myself, and tell him I want the money for a private purpose of my own. Take down your hand, dear, and let us go on with the accounts. I have looked over the list and the remarks." She cared nothing for the accounts, but she wanted the husband whom she loved to be his old self again.

He took down his hand and pressed hers, and stroked her smooth hair.

"I am sorry and ashamed," he said, "but I am awfully hard pressed, and you have delivered me."

"Let us go on with the list now, William, and say no more of this matter. Give me the list."

He handed her the papers without a word. Before sitting down he bent over her and patted her hair and kissed her forehead.

"I know nearly all the names," she said, "but, of course, I have never seen any of the people."

"You have not missed much by that, Nellie," he said in tremulous tones, as though rendered almost tearful by her generosity. "They are a rough lot."

At the same time he was thinking how much more delightful it would be to have

Hetty Layard, with all her buoyant youth, sitting by his side than this faded elderly invalid. But then Hetty had no money. A man ought to be allowed two wives: one with money, who need not be young or beautiful, and one with beauty, who need not be rich.

Mrs. Crawford ran her finger down the names of her tenants, and the houses which were tenantless, commenting as she went, and trying to make her own remarks bear out his theory that the tenants did not pay because they were not sure he was her husband.

“Mrs. Pemberton has not paid, I see. I don’t wonder at all at that. Poor soul, she has had a great struggle for years, ever since her husband’s death. She has tried to help herself along by letting lodgings, Mr. Blore told me, but that won’t come to much in such a poor neighbourhood. I’m

sure I don't know what could induce any one to lodge in such a district."

"People are often obliged to lodge near their place of business, no matter how objectionable their place of business may be," said he sententiously. Then he added with a smile, "Why, recollect, Nellie, that I myself am a lodger for business purposes in the locality."

"Of course you are, dear. I quite forgot that. And what kind of people are you lodging with?" she asked cheerfully, anxious to get his mind as far away as possible from those wretched Consols and rapacious artificers.

"O, they seem to be quiet respectable people enough. A little slow, you know, but perhaps none the worse for that when they have for a lodger such a gay young spark as I." He smiled.

She looked lovingly at him, and laughed

at the enormity of the joke of his calling himself gay and fancying any society could harm *him*. "And now you must tell me what your landlord and landlady are like." He seemed to have forgotten about the wretched Consols and rapacious artificers.

"Well, Layard is a man who has something to do in the gas-house. The chief thing about him is a long beard. He's rather like a monkey with a beard."

"And what is Miss Layard like?"

"She's like a monkey without a beard," he said, with one of his short quick laughs. "As I thought before I went there, she's about ten or twelve years older than he. She's one of those dowdy little women, don't you know, dear, whose new clothes always look second-hand." Again came his short quick laugh. "She belongs to what geologists would call the anti-macassar era. There's a dreadful Phyllis,

or somebody else, in tapestry, framed over their sitting-room mantelshelf. She told me she worked it when she was young. But I ought not to laugh at the worthy soul. It is ungrateful of me ; for I never tasted a more delicious omelette than she made for my breakfast. I must get her next time to give me the recipe for you, Nellie." He put his arms round his wife's shoulder and pressed his lips upon her smooth hair.

"I think, William," said she, "we are the happiest couple in England."

"And I'm sure of it," said he in a tone of full conviction.

She sighed a sigh of perfect contentment.

He sighed, thinking of Hetty Layard and her golden hair and luminous blue eyes, and her lithe round figure, and her fresh young voice, and the sweet red young lips

through which that voice came to make sunshine and joy in the air.

“Shall I go on with the list, dear?” she asked.

She took no interest on her own part in this list; but then the interest of him and her was bound together in it, and there was a charm for her in the bond—not the thing binding them.

“Yes, dear,” he answered, wishing the list at the bottom of the Red Sea among the chariots of Pharaoh.

She ran through a few more items on the paper, and then paused, and said with a laugh :

“Here is one store, I see, from which you got neither money nor promise.”

“What is that?”

“Ice-house, Crawford’s Bay.”

“O, ay. I examined the place with much interest. I believe it is in ruins.

The gates are off, the lower part of it is full of water. I am told there are eight or ten feet of water in it."

"The place has not been let for ever so many years. I never saw an ice-house. I wonder what one is like."

"I'll tell you. It's exactly like a huge room of brick, lined with thick boards, and one-third below the ground. I examined this one very closely, thoroughly. There are no floors in it but the one at the bottom of the tank—no ladders—nothing. It is like a great empty tank lined with wood."

"And you say the one at Crawford's Bay is full of water?" she asked.

"Yes."

She shuddered and drew the light shawl she wore tightly round her shoulders.

"How dreadfully dark and cold it must be there, William?"

“Yes; but bless me, Nellie, no one *lives* in an ice-house, and this one isn’t even let!” he cried in surprise.

“I know. But suppose some one should fall into it? Don’t you think the doors ought to be put up?”

“My dear Nellie, there isn’t the least occasion to waste money on a useless place like that. Of course if we should let it we would be only too happy to put it into good repair. But what is the good of throwing money away?”

“But the danger?”

“Well, as far as that goes, you may make your mind perfectly easy. No one has access to the little quay or wharf but the people in Crawford’s House. The rest of the property is lying idle, and from what I have seen of the Layards they are not the people to go wandering about on the wharf after dark. Besides, they know that

the ice-house is full of water. It was Layard's maiden sister first told me."

He laughed at the idea of calling blooming young Hetty Layard's maiden sister.

"But the child, William—the child!" persisted the invalid. "Suppose by some misfortune the child should stray that way and fall in?"

"Nellie, no person with an atom of sense would think of permitting a child out on that wharf. Why, the canal, the waters of Crawford's Bay, are only a few steps from the back door of Crawford's House, and who would let a child play on the banks of a canal? I mean, of course, no people like the Layards would allow their child to play there."

"But this awful dark huge tank you tell me of is a thousand times worse than the open canal. If a child fell into the open canal people would see him, but if he fell

into that dreadful tank he would be drowned, poor little fellow, before any one missed him. I do wish, William, you would get the doors put up. You see, as you tell me, there was no danger up to this, for no one could get near it; but now there is a child."

She pleaded with gestures and her eyes and her voice, as though a child of her own were menaced.

He held out his hand to her and took hers in his.

"There, Nellie, I will. I'll see the place made quite safe. Of course I'll go down and arrange about it if you wish it."

She raised the hand she held and kissed it.

He thought what a chance this would give him of meeting the Layards—Hetty—before the month was out!

"Shall I roll you round to your own

place now, and you can go on with your paper and I with my book?"

"Thank you, dear."

He took up the volume, but he did not read. He fell into a profound reverie. First of all, he began to think of how pleasant it would be to tell Hetty that he had become alarmed for the safety of her little nephew, and had come back before his time to see about putting doors upon the ice-house. Hetty and he would go out on the quay, and look at the place and talk the matter over.

There was one good thing, the quay on which the ice-house stood was not visible from the tow-path, so that even if Philip Ray should chance to pass by he could not be seen.

Then his thoughts took another turn, and became concentrated on Philip Ray. He mused a long time upon his sworn enemy.

Suddenly he shook all over, as if a chill had struck him. His blood seemed to thicken in his veins. His eyes stood in his head, staring straight out before him, perceiving nothing present in that room, but seeing a ghastly awful sight in that dim dark ice-house.

On the surface of the cold secret waters of the huge tank he saw a hideous object : the upturned face of a dead man, the face of Philip Ray.

Crawford's breath came short, and he panted. His mouth opened, his eyes dilated.

Philip Ray, lying drowned in that hideous lonely water where no one would ever think of looking for him ! It was a perfect way out of the terror of Philip Ray's anger which beset him. It was a thing to think upon for ever. *A thing that might come to pass !*

“ William,” said the sweet low voice of

his wife, "here is a strange thing in the paper to-day. You remember the awful nightmare you had, in which you thought two of your schoolfellows long ago were going to shoot you?"

"Yes," he answered hoarsely, but he did not know what she had said. He knew she had asked a question, and he answered "Yes." He was in a trance.

"Well, here in to-day's *Telegraph* are the two names together. Listen: 'On the 28th inst., at her residence, London, Kate, wife of Francis Mellor (*née* Ray), late of Greenfield, near Beechley, Sussex.'"

"Eh?" he cried, suddenly starting up from his chair and looking wildly at his wife. "Read that again."

In dire alarm at his manner she read again: "'On the 28th inst., at her residence, London, Kate, wife of Francis Mellor (*née*

Ray), late of Greenfield, near Beechley, Sussex.' ”

“What is the good of your playing with me, you fool! Her death is no good to me. I am done with her. It's his life I want, and, by ——, I shall have it too!”

“William!” cried the terrified wife. “My William! Come to me. I cannot go to you. What is the matter? You look strange, and you are saying dreadful things, and you have sworn an awful oath. What is the matter? Are you unwell? Come to me.”

A sudden tremor passed through him, and with a dazed expression he looked round him.

With his short laugh he said, “I hope I didn't frighten you, Nellie, dear. I was only going over a passage of a play we used to act at school. I was always good at private theatricals.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE TOW-PATH BY NIGHT.

It was now the second week in June. The weather had been without a flaw. From dawn to evening the sun had moved through almost cloudless skies. It was a splendid time for children to enjoy themselves out of doors, and every day Freddie was carried from the back door of Crawford's House by his Aunt Hetty, handed into the arms of Francis Bramwell, and borne across to Boland's Ait, there to spend his time in riotous fancy and boisterous play with Frank Bramwell till the dinner hour.

The two boys got on famously together. Freddie was the taller and lustier of the

two, with plenty of animal spirits and enterprise in him, full of indulgent good-humour and patronising protection for his companion. Frank was more sedate and thoughtful. He had a closer and a keener mind, and as such minds are generally fascinated by the gifts of physical exuberance and mental intrepidity, he gave in to his gayer and more adventurous playmate. Each was the complement of the other. Freddie took after his Aunt Hetty in person and mind, and Frank after his father in disposition and his mother in appearance.

The fortnight had wrought a marvellous change in Francis Bramwell. In his youth he had been a dreamer, a poet. When he met Kate Ray he became a lover of her, at times austere and lofty, at times tempestuous. When he married he remained the lover still. After the flight of his wife he plunged headlong into all the fierce excite-

ment of gambling, and led a completely reckless life. Then all at once he rushed into the direct opposite, took up his abode on the last rod of his property, Boland's Ait, and lived there the severe life of an anchorite, lived face to face with the ruins of the past and possessed his soul in silence, and mused upon the ways of Providence, and broke his spirit to the Christian law of patient endurance.

Now, for the first time in his life, he was confronted with material duties which had to be performed with his own hand. His income he now considered inadequate, and it could be increased only by his own labour. He had already planned and partly written a few articles which he hoped to get accepted by papers or magazines. He had been ashore twice and made some simple additions to the furniture of the cottage, and bought toys for Frank and

Freddie to play with. He had levelled and smoothed and swept the old timber-yard for the boys, and put the playroom in order against a rainy day. For the two years he had dwelt alone on the Ait he had lived most frugally, and had not used up all his slender income, so that these little expenses did not come out of revenue.

It cheers the heart to have anything to do, and it soothes and sustains the heart when we have the result of our activity always at hand under our eyes.

Of mornings he had to dress Frank, an operation he at first executed with clumsiness and in despair. He had to get the boy his breakfast and watch him while he ate it. After that he had to fetch Freddie, set the two young people safely in the timber-yard, and, having secured the gate, go back to his sitting-room and write or meditate his articles until it was time for

Freddie to go home. The boy's dinner had to be got ready, and then after the departure of Mrs. Treleaven he shut the outer door, gave Frank the run of the house, and sat down to his papers once more till tea. This meal he prepared without the aid of Mrs. Treleaven, and shortly after tea he had to undress little Frank and put him to bed.

He had been a dreamer, a poet, a lover, a gambler, a recluse. Now he was becoming a man. His duties were humanising him. When he lay down at night it was not, as of old, to live over again the hideous past with its vast calamity; but to dwell on the events of the day with restful complacency, and to contemplate with gentle satisfaction the cares and duties of the morrow. In the old days of his isolation his veins seemed filled with acrid juices, with vinegar and gall. In these nights, as he lay

feeling the balm of slumber coming down upon him through the bland summer air, the milk of human kindness beat within his pulses.

In the old days his prayers were for deliverance and for a spirit of charity. But he prayed for that spirit of charity because charity was enjoined by the Great Teacher. He did not pray for deliverance in the form of death now. He prayed that he might be spared to look after his boy. He had no need to pray for charity now; for was not his child lying there beside him safe and sound and full of rosy health, and was not the child's mother forgiven by him and by a Greater, and in Heaven?

He never thought of Ainsworth. Why should he? Kate was dead, and he had his child, and what was all the rest of the world to him? Nothing.

To himself he admitted the situation was anomalous, and that he was ill-qualified to take care of so young a child. Of course it would be worse than folly to think of his sister in Australia. She had her husband and her own children, and was prosperous there. It never occurred to him once to send his boy to her. The idea that she might come over to take charge of his Frank had only arisen to his mind in dreams, to be laughed at upon waking. Of course a woman, not a man, was the natural guardian of a child of little Frank's age. Look at the care Miss Layard took of Freddie. What a lucky fellow Layard was to have such a sister to mind his boy!

Then in a dream, just as he had the idea of his sister travelling all the way from Australia to rear Frank, the idea came to him that it would be a good thing if Miss Layard would take charge of Frank ;

this, too, was only to be laughed at upon waking. Miss Layard was not a servant whom he could employ, or a sister of whom he could expect such a service. The thing was an absurdity worthy of mid-summer madness, but what a pity it should be absurd!

He had dreamed the dream only once about his sister. He had dreamed the dream more than once about Miss Layard. This would be accounted for, no doubt, by the fact that he saw and spoke to Miss Layard every day.

The thought of leaving the Ait and taking a lodging ashore had presented itself to his mind, only to be dismissed after a few moments' consideration. By this time, after his two years of solitude, he had become accustomed to attending upon himself, and felt no more awkwardness in this respect than a sailor. He could

cook his food and light his fire and make his bed as though he had been accustomed to shift for himself all his life. For two years he had been accustomed to all these services, and now he had the advantage of Mrs. Treleaven's daily visit, which relieved him of much of the drudgery. A lodging such as his present means could command would be unbearable. All his life, until the beginning of his reckless year, he had been accustomed to elegance and refinement. And all his life, until his retirement to the islet, he had lived in comfort, and part of his life in affluence. He could not endure the thought of contact with vulgar grasping landladies, and, above all, he could not entertain the idea of exposing this child to the dulling and saddening intercourse with the unrefined folk to be found in such houses. He should be able to afford but one room, and how

could he pursue literary studies or labours with little Frank at his very elbow? To let the child consort with those around them would be worse than all the inconveniences of this place.

No. He must stay where he was until he had mended his fortunes with his pen. The old timber-yard was a capital playground for Frank and Freddie in the fine weather, and when it rained there was the room he had prepared for them in the cottage. Besides——

Besides, if he went to live ashore Frank would no longer have so suitable a playmate as Freddie. He himself should certainly miss the cheerful, vivacious little chap who lived at Crawford's House, and—yes, and the brief meetings morning and afternoon with the gay and beautiful and sympathetic girl, Miss Layard. Let things be as they were.

Miss Layard had more than once repeated her brother's invitation to Bramwell that he should go over for an hour in the evening. He always pleaded in excuse the reason given for him by Philip Ray on the occasion of his hastily and unthinkingly accepting the first invitation. He could not leave the boy. Then she asked him to bring the boy. This could not be done either. Why? Well, because it would be giving them too much trouble. Nothing of the kind. They would be only too delighted to have Frank. Well, then, if that reason would not serve, it would not be good for the child to keep him up so late; he was always in bed a little after seven o'clock.

But Philip Ray had gone over often, and brought back word that they were very nice people, and he liked to talk a great deal about them, particularly the brother,

to Bramwell, and Bramwell thought that when Philip came back from Crawford's house he was always more cool and rational, and so he was always glad when his brother-in-law went.

It is one of the curious regulations of the South London Canal that, while you have to pay toll if you wish to walk along the tow-path by day, you are free to use it by night for nothing. This rule would seem to be made out of a benevolent view to suicides. A more dreary and dangerous and murderous-looking place there is not in all London than that tow-path by night. To think, merely to think, in the daytime of walking under one of those low arches in the dark is enough to make one shudder.

The distance from the base of the arch to the edge of the water is not more than six feet. If you keep near the wall you

have to bend towards the water ; if you keep near the water it seems as though some hideous and terrifying influence will draw you into the foul, dark, stagnant, sinister flood. It appears to be waiting for you, passively waiting there for you, with the full knowledge that you must come, that you are coming, that you are come. It seems to have a purpose apart from all other things about it, and that purpose is to draw you. It seems to say in an unuttered voice, "I am Death and Silence."

If, as you stood under one of those odious arches, you stooped slowly, slowly until your hand touched the brink, you would have to thrust your fingers down an inch further to touch the water itself. And then you would find it was dead—that it had no motion ; that by the sense of touch alone you could not tell

which way the canal flows, the current is so slow—so deadly slow. In the plutonian darkness under the bridge you could see nothing, and from the dead water a peculiar and awful silence seems to rise like an exhalation.

You would not utter a word there to save your life. You would feel you had no life to save, that it already belonged to the water. If, then, as you stooped you slipped, you would roll into the water without a splash, for you would be on a level with the surface. You could not utter a cry, for the terrible, the odious influence of the place would be upon you. Even if you called out your voice would be of no avail, for no human being could hear you, and it would only infuriate the obscene genius of the place. Then, if the terror did not kill you instantly, the waters would — slowly — surely, for there is nothing to lay hold of

but those flat slippery stones, and you would be in the stagnant water against a perpendicular wall. The sharp pains of the most perfect torture-chamber ever designed would not be equal to dying there alone upright against that wall, holding on by those smooth slippery flat stones on a level with your chin, and as you were gradually pulled down, down, down, inch by inch, by the loathsome genius of these waters.

But the horrors of this place are seldom invaded at night by human foot. Often from summer dark to summer dawn no tread of man beats upon that forlorn tow-path. After nightfall the place has an evil reputation in the neighbourhood. More than a dozen times in the memory of living people cold and clammy things, once men and women, have been drawn slowly, laboriously, with dripping clothes, out of

these turbid waters. No man but one sorely pressed by necessity would think of taking that path at midnight: and even when in dire haste he would have need of strong nerves to face it, to set out upon it, to plunge into it. For, unlike the streets and roadways that go by the dwellings of kindly men, once upon it there is no way from it, no cross-road or byway until the stretch of half-a-mile or a mile is accomplished. If any supreme terror or danger menaced the traveller on that path, he has only one refuge, one means of escape, one sanctuary to seek—the canal itself.

In the ditch, on the inner side of the path, you cannot know what may be crouching. Shapes and forms and monsters too hateful for sanity to endure may be lurking in that ditch, and may spring out on you, on your unprotected side, at any moment as you walk along. If this should happen

would not it be better for you to seek blindness and extinction in the waters?

Or may there not lie in wait some shapes in human form more appalling than gorgon or chimera dire, some human ghouls who have committed crimes never dreamt of by the soul of affrighted man? May not these come forth and whisper at your ear as you go by, and tell you what they have done in tombs and charnel houses until the flesh falls off your bones with dread, and you take these waters of forgetfulness at your side to be not a river of Orcus, but of blissful deliverance?

And what a place is this for a woman by night!

She has crept cautiously out of Leeham and struck the canal at Leeham Bridge. At that time all Leeham is asleep in bed or at work in the great gasworks. Not a soul is abroad but two or three people moving

to or from the Neptune at the end of the Pine Groves.

The woman creeps cautiously from the road down the approach leading to the canal. There is not a soul on the tow-path; the place is as still as a cave. She can hear the beating of her own heart distinctly as she walks along, keeping in the shadow.

But she will have to come out of the shadow in a moment, or rather she will have to enter the sphere of light, for on the tow-path to her left there is a gas-lamp.

She darts quickly through the patch of light and into the cavernous darkness of the bridge.

In that brief period of illumination all that could be seen was that she did not exceed the average height of woman, might be a little below it; that she was poorly clad; that she wore a bonnet and thick impenetrable veil; that she was covered from

neck to heel with a long dark cloak, and that the ungloved hand which grasped the cloak in front and held it close was thin and white.

She did not seem conscious of any of the horrors of that dismal arch; while under it she was more free from the chance of observation than on the road or approach. She drew herself more upright, and slackened her pace for a moment. Then with another shudder she walked swiftly from under the arch and set off for Welford Bridge.

On her right lay a ditch neither wet nor dry; on her left the voiceless waters of the canal, and beyond the canal a line of mute, uninhabited, inscrutable wharves which looked like dead parts of a living city which had drifted away, leaving this rack behind.

She sped on, unheeding her surroundings.

She did not look to left or right. She kept the edge of the canal, as though the water were the best friend she had there. Now and then with her white ungloved hand she drew her cloak closer round her, rather as though to preserve her own resolution within it, to prevent her purpose from escaping, than to protect her from observation from without.

She came within the shadow of the mighty gas-house, which, too, was silent, save now and then a startling and alarming clamour of metal, as though the summons of Titan to witness some overwhelming disaster. Against the blue sky and pallid stars of early summer the huge chimneys, and cranes, and pillars, and tanks, and viaducts, and scaffolding, and shoots, and the enormous and towering masses of the gasometers, stood up in a piece like some prodigious engine of one motive, some

monstrous machine used in the building of mountains or hollowing out of seas. Now and then, through apertures low down in this prodigious engine, small living things, no bigger than insects in comparison with the mass, came and stood clearly visible, pricked out in the darkness against the glow within. These were men flying for a moment from the fiery heat of the huge instrument to cool their bodies and their lungs in the open air.

The woman took no more note of all this wonderful work of man than to draw her cloak to her on that side, lest it might distract her from her purpose.

At length, as she kept on her way undismayed, she approached a black mass of shadow, stretching across the canal and tow-path, as though to bar her further progress.

As she drew nearer, an arc of light ap-

peared in the centre of this dark barrier, and beyond, or rather in the middle of the arc a speck of brighter light still.

The dark barrier was Welford Bridge; the larger and duller light in the middle of it was the eye of the bridge; and the central ray, like the light on the pupil of an eye, was the lamp in the bedroom of Boland's Ait.

The woman paused when she saw this latter light, and, leaving the margin of the canal, crossed the tow-path to a low warehouse and leaned against the wall in the shadow to rest.

From the point at which she now stood resting against the wall she could see the light in the open window of the cottage.

Presently the spark formed by the lamp waved. The lamp had been removed from the window-sill. The sash of the window was allowed to remain up. There was a

sudden flicker of light, and then all in the cottage was dark. The lamp had been extinguished.

The woman withdrew her shoulder from the wall, gathered her cloak round her, and resumed her way along the edge of the tow-path, going south. She walked more slowly now, as if in thought or to give time. She walked as though she must, because of her inclination, make progress, but must not for some reason make too quick an advance.

Presently she stepped into the profound gloom under Welford Bridge, and in a few seconds emerged upon the other side. Here she made another pause.

Not a soul was in sight. She had met no one since taking the tow-path at Leeham. The night was perfectly still. She looked around at the bridge, and then moved rapidly along the path, as though wish-

ing to get beyond the point at which she might attract the attention of any one looking over the parapet.

When about two hundred yards from the bridge she paused once more. Here was no building against which she could lean, but instead a sharply sloping bank surmounted by a wall. Opposite where she stood a large log of wood reclined against the slope. She crept over and leaned against the bank beside the log. In this position she would be perfectly invisible to any one looking over the parapet, or even passing along the tow-path carelessly. Here the horse-track was more than twice its ordinary width, and between the trodden part of the path and the bank spread a space of grass-grown waste of equal width.

Directly opposite to her stood Crawford's House, and a little further to the left Boland's Ait. She put her hollowed right

hand behind her ear, leaned her head towards the islet, and listened intently. Not a sound. She closed her eyes and concentrated all her faculties in the one of hearing. The tranquillity of the cloudless night was unbroken by any murmur but the dull dead murmur that always hangs over the city, and is faintly perceptible even here.

Suddenly a soft gentle sound stole upon her ears, but not from the desired quarter. The voice of a woman singing reached her. She opened her eyes. A light burned now in the top room of Crawford's House.

The wayfarer on the tow-path could make nothing out, owing to the distance and to the light being behind the singer, save that a woman was standing at the open window and humming in a very low voice an old lullaby song. The light of the lamp came through the hair of the singer, and the

listener saw that the colour of the hair was golden.

The watcher leaned back against the bank, closed her eyes, and put her hands over her ears. She remained so a considerable time. When she opened her eyes the light had been extinguished. She took her hands down from her ears—all was still once more.

She looked up and down the track carefully, and strained her ear to catch footfalls; but no one was in view, and no noise of feet broke the frozen monotony of the silence. Gathering her cloak around her, she left her resting-place, and, having gained the edge of the water, resumed her way at a rapid rate in a southerly direction until she got opposite the tail of Boland's Ait.

Here she reduced her pace, and kept on with her eyes fixed eagerly on the ground at her feet. She bent forward, and as low

as she could. Apparently, she was looking for some mark.

There gleamed the full light of unclouded June night and unsullied faint blue June stars, but no moon aided her search.

At length she stopped and examined the ground very closely. Then she stooped lower still, and thrust her hand down, passing it outside the bank until it touched the water.

She seized some object first with one hand, and then with both, and drew back from the bank softly, cautiously, as though her very life depended on the care she took. Something stretched from her hands—a line, a chain. It was fast to the bank, and reached from her hands out into the water a few feet from where she stood.

She had in her hands the chain by which the floating stage was drawn from Boland's Ait across the canal when any one wanted

to go from the tow-path to the island. The chain yielded with her a little, and then would come no more. She drew upon it with all her might, but it simply rose out of the water at a slightly increased distance from the bank. She became desperate, and pulled with all her might and main. She dug her heels into the ground, and threw the whole weight of her body backward. To no avail.

She tore off her cloak and flung it on the ground that she might have greater freedom. She dragged at the chain, now pulling it from one side, now from the other. The stage did not move. Her hands were cut and bleeding.

She stooped low and got the chain over her shoulder, and flung the whole weight of her body over and over again into the loop.

The harsh rugged chain tore the skin and

flesh of her soft delicate shoulder until it too bled. But the stage remained motionless.

She sank down on the ground half insensible from despair and pain.

She rose up and put the chain on the uninjured shoulder, and wrenched and tore and struggled at it, whispering to herself, "I will—I must—I tell you I must see my child once more before I die. I only want to see him asleep, through the window, any way, once. Do you hear me? I *will* see my child before I die. A mother has a right to see her child before she dies. Mercy, mercy, mercy! One look, only one before I go away for ever!"

She sank to the ground again. The chain slipped from her shoulder, and with a moan she spread out her torn and bleeding hands on the rugged ground and lay still.

The first faint streaks of dawn were in

the sky before she recovered consciousness. She rose, put on her cloak, and with dejected head and tottering steps turned her back upon the Ait and walked in the direction of Leeham.



CHAPTER VIII.

A HOSTAGE AT CRAWFORD'S HOUSE.

THE failure of Philip Ray's expedition to Richmond had dispirited him in the pursuit of the man whom he called John Ainsworth, but whom Richmond knew as William Crawford. He was an impulsive man in action, but when action was denied to him, he could make little or no progress. He was a man of devices rather than plans. In the heat of action he could invent, but he needed the stimulus of present necessity or expediency before he could design. He could carry out a plan, not invent one. He was a good captain, but no general.

Hence, when he found himself baffled at Richmond, he did not know in what direction to turn for a clue to Ainsworth. He

chafed under his impotency ; but he could not remove it. The conclusion to which he came was that Ainsworth did not live at Richmond, and he hated that town because of the disappointment he had experienced in it. His determination to take vengeance on Ainsworth was still unshaken ; but he felt that, having missed his man once, the likelihood of encountering him again was diminished. Say, according to the law of chances, they should be fated to meet twice in ten years : one of those meetings had been missed, owing to the ill-luck of his not being in Richmond the day Lambton saw Ainsworth there. This, of course, was not logical, but then no one who knew Ray ever expected him to be influenced by pure reason. It was not according to the law of chances, for he had had no chance of seeing Ainsworth in Richmond, since he himself had not been in the town that day.

On the evening of his return from Richmond he had been asked by Bramwell to go and apologise to Layard for the postponement or abandonment of his brother-in-law's visit. Layard had opened the door for him, and, seeing a young man he did not know, and having heard from Hetty that Bramwell had promised to call, he concluded that this was the promised visitor; held out his hand, and had drawn Philip inside the door before the latter could explain. As soon as Ray had told Layard he was not the expected man, and that he was only a relative of the desired guest, "Well," said Layard with one of his unexpected bright smiles on his homely face, "since you have ventured into the bandit's cave, I must hold you as hostage until he comes to release, or reclaim, or redeem you. Sit down."

"But he will not come. He cannot come, he expects me back. He is unable to come

because he cannot leave the boy alone," said Ray, somewhat disarmed and drawn towards this ugly man with the kind voice and suprising smile.

"Well, now, you cannot plead the same excuse. You are here, in the first place, and, in the second place, the boy's not alone now. Do sit down, pray. I do not make a new acquaintance once in a year, and I haven't a single companionable neighbour. You won't miss half-an-hour out of your life, and I should take it as a favour if you gave me one."

What could Ray do but sit down?

"Do you smoke?" asked Layard.

"Yes."

"For," said Layard, as they lit their pipes, "my sister says she is certain Mr. Bramwell doesn't smoke; and her reason for thinking so is because he seems not to be a fool."

"Then," said Ray, putting down his

pipe, "perhaps Miss Layard objects to smoking."

"Not she," said Layard; "it is only her disagreeable way of rebuking me. Please go on with your pipe."

"Old maids," thought Ray, "invariably do object to smoking. I'm sorry I sat down, and now I can't in decency get up for a while. An elderly female edition of this man would be a dreadful sight."

His own handsome face, with its straight brows and straight nose, was reflected behind Layard's back in the little mirror of the chiffonier.

"You do not live in this neighbourhood?" asked Layard, when Ray had resumed his pipe.

"No. I live in Camberwell."

Layard straightened himself in his chair, and looked hard at the other for a few seconds.

"That receding forehead," thought Ray, "indicates a weak intellect. I hope I am not face to face alone with a madman. What on earth is the ape looking at! I wish this gorgon sister, however hideous she may be, would come in."

The door opened, and, in response to his thought, the gorgon entered.

"My sister, Mr. Ray. Hetty, Mr. Ray has called to say that Mr. Bramwell cannot come this evening; he must not leave his little boy alone, and I have impounded Mr. Ray."

Ray bowed, and took in his hand the slender hand that was held out to him with a smile, took in his eyes the smile and the beauty of the girl, and said to himself, "Are they real?"

He was disposed to think some trick was being played upon him, for, from what Frank said, he had been prepared for

age and ugliness ; and what Layard had said about the smoking had prepared him for sourness and sarcastic eyes, and here——!

Hetty sat down quite close to Philip, and he felt very strangely at this, because still he had the feeling that there must be some trick in the affair ; since he was prepared for blue spectacles, and a blue nose, and a front, perhaps, and prominent teeth. And here, instead, were the brightest and bluest and most cheerful eyes he had ever seen, instead of spectacles ; and a lovely delicate, shapely nose, with the least suggestion of an aquiline curve in it, and of the colour of the petal of a white rose that lies over the petal of a red rose, and hair that was like amber against the sun, and teeth as even as a child's and as white as a fresh-cut apple. Was it all real?

“ Won't you go on smoking, Mr. Ray ? ”
said the apparition at his side.

"I will," said Ray, not knowing what he said, but putting the pipe mechanically into his mouth. He didn't even say "Thank you." He had still some notion of unreality in his mind. Was it a dream, if it wasn't a trick? Anyway, it would be best to be on his guard, so he only said "I will," without even "Thank you." He was waiting to see what would happen next.

The next thing that happened was nothing to astonish an ordinary mortal, but it filled Philip Ray with such a feeling of at once disappointment and joy that he was afterwards certain he must have spoken incoherently for a few minutes.

Said Layard to Hetty, "I was just on the point of saying to Mr. Ray when you came in that if, by any misfortune, another quarter of an hour went by without my getting food, all would be up with me."

With a laugh Hetty rose and left the room.

Ray thought, "That strange look I saw in his eyes must have been the bale-fire of cannibalism. He must have been thinking of eating me!"

Then in a few minutes the strangest thing in this dream happened before Philip's eyes. The girl of whose reality he had such doubt carried in the supper-things like the simplest maiden that ever ministered to man. Philip rose and stood with his back against the mantelpiece, looking on, while Layard helped his sister to spread the feast and kept up a running commentary on the various articles as they were placed on the table.

When all was ready they sat down, Philip still feeling dull and heavy, like one in a dream. Could it be that this incomparable being was no more in that

household than the sister of the host? Could it be that she busied herself with plates and knives and forks, and beef and salad and cress, just like other girls he had seen? Incredible! And yet if he had not been dreaming, so it was.

“Pepper, mustard, vinegar, oil! I see only four cruets, Hetty,” said Alfred Layard reproachfully. “What is the meaning of only four cruets? Where is the fifth?”

“There are only four bottles. What do you want, Alfred?”

“I do not want anything, but Mr. Ray does. Mr. Ray, do you take your arsenic with your beef or in the salad?”

Philip looked from one to the other with a stupid smile. He felt more than ever that the whole thing was unreal, notwithstanding the fact that he was eating and drinking.

“When you know Alfred better, you

won't mind anything he says," said the girl, addressing the guest.

"Speak for yourself," said Layard solemnly and in a warning voice. "Listen to me! Just as you came into the room, Hetty——"

"O, I know! You told us that before. You were on the point of fainting from hunger."

"No! That was only my way of putting it. What I really meant was that I did not feel myself able to face the discovery I had made without the aid of food instantly applied, and in ample quantities."

"But what about the arsenic?" she asked, with a look of perplexed amusement.

"I'm coming to the arsenic."

"I thought you intended it for Mr. Ray. What has he done?"

"Hetty, you are flippant. What has he

done? Why, do you know that he lives at Camberwell?" cried Layard, putting down his knife and fork, and glaring at his sister with a horrified expression.

"Is that a capital offence at Welford?" asked Ray, trying to rouse himself.

"In the present connection it is ten thousand times a worse crime than slaying the sacred Ibis. You live at Camberwell. You walk along the tow-path. You get by a floating stage from the tow-path to Boland's Ait. Confess! You may as well confess. I see it all now. Were you on Boland's Ait within the past week?"

"Certainly; I confess I was. Is that a still greater offence than living at Camberwell?"

"It makes part of the stupendous crime."

"And what is the stupendous crime?"

"Our sometime lodger, Mr. Crawford,

saw you come along the track, saw you disappear behind the head of the island, and saw you did not reappear at the other end. Being thus unable to make head or tail of you, he thought you were drowned, and insisted on my going out at a most untimely hour in order that we might make certain of your fate. As we just got under Welford Bridge you stepped out from under it, looking not a penny the worse ; I say you deserve death for these abnormal aquatic habits of yours, by which you disturb a quiet household, and take a peaceful citizen like me away from his warm fireside into the bleak winds of December close on midnight."

"I'm very sorry, I'm sure," said Ray, with a smile, "and I am very much indebted to Mr. Crawford for the interest he took in me. He must be a very kind-hearted man."

“He’s a hero!” cried Hetty enthusiastically. “A Bayard!”

“But, as I told you before, rather fat for the part,” said her brother. “Mr. Ray, he is our lodger and our landlord, and hence he must be above all reproach. Our association with him would put him all right if he was a Thug. But my sister is really too much carried away by her admiration for this Bayard because he married a rich woman——”

“Who is a hopeless invalid,” broke in Hetty.

“Who owns a good deal of property in this neighbourhood——”

“And is ever so much older than he. I call him a most heroic man.”

“And large savings out of her income.”

“Mr. Ray, don’t mind Alfred. He is only joking. In his secret heart he admires Mr. Crawford as much as I do; but he will

not give in. This man saved Mrs. Crawford from being burned in her house. She is ever so much older than he, and he married her out of a wish to make her happy after saving her life at the risk of his own." The girl became quite excited as she spoke. Her lips quivered, her cheeks flushed, the golden light blazed in her blue eyes.

Her brother looked at her with admiration.

Philip Ray looked at her, and for the first time in his life realised ecstasy. He had never tasted the wine of love before, and now he was drinking the most potent and intoxicating of all kinds—love at first sight.

"I consider," he said, at last fully awake, "Mr. Crawford a very lucky man." He meant in having so beautiful an advocate.

"So do I," said Layard, meaning in a worldly sense.

“And does he live with you always?” asked Ray, who had some confused memory of the phrase, “sometime lodger.”

“No,” said Hetty. “He is to come to us for only a couple or three days a month. He has his offices for the property upstairs.”

“O, I see,” said Ray, much relieved. He did not want this object of her admiration to be near her. He was now interested no more in Mr. Crawford. To keep the conversation going, he said, “And where does Mr. Crawford live the rest of the time?”

“At Richmond.”

He started. The name of the town was a harsh, discordant note; but he said nothing, and shortly after took his leave, promising to call again.

From that night he visited almost every evening at Crawford's House. When he was not there he pitied himself with a

pathetic, desperate pity. When he was there he wondered how all the rest of the world could be content to dwell so far apart from her.



CHAPTER IX.

CRAWFORD SELLS A PATENT.

A FEW days after William Crawford's return from Welford, and the scene in which he gave his wife a specimen of his quality as the player of a part in private theatricals, he went up to London with one of the hundred pounds in his pocket. He told her he could not dream of taking the money from her except to pay the men working on the models and machines for his great patent, and in the interest of their joint worldly welfare.

He set off, as usual, in the afternoon, taking with him half the money. He was a gambler, but no plunger. He played for the excitement of the game, rather than for

the sake of gaining. He had no idea that he should win a fortune. His luck was usually bad, but this did not keep him back; nor did he play on in the hope or expectation that it would turn so as to recoup him. Every gambler is entitled to curse his luck, and Crawford cursed his with no bated breath. But he would rather have bad luck than no play. He was not a mean man with money when he had it, but he was a desperate man when he wanted it.

Cards and pretty faces were his weaknesses. With regard to cards, he recognised the laws of honour; with regard to pretty faces, he regarded no law but the law of his wishes. He had never been in love in his life. He admired pretty women, and made love to every pretty woman he met, if occasion served. But he was completely wanting in any feeling of self-sacrifice or

devotion. He was, as he told his wife, good at private theatricals. He could play the heroic, or romantic, or sentimental lover, according as circumstances demanded, to the utmost perfection ; but his heart was never once touched. He looked on women as inferior creatures, the natural prey of man. With them he had no mercy or compunction. He made love automatically to the owner of every pretty face he came across, provided there was no great risk from male friend or relative ; for, though he could assume the air and words of a hero in the presence of a woman, he fought shy of men in their anger, and was of that prudent disposition that prefers flight to fight.

On going to town this afternoon, he left half the money he had got from his wife behind him. One hundred pounds was quite enough for one night ; one hundred

pounds was quite as good as two. Playing for certain stakes, one hundred pounds would last him the whole night, even if luck were dead against him. Two hundred pounds would enable him to play for stakes of double the amount : that was all. He would rather play two nights for small stakes than one night for stakes of double the value.

William Crawford was a cautious, not to say cowardly, man. This talk of the artificers engaged in making a machine for him was not wholly illusory. From time to time he ordered inexpensive portions of machinery at a mechanical engineer's in the Blackfriars Road. He never took the parts of the machine away ; but left them in the workshops, saying he would not remove them until it was all ready to be put together. He had no fear that he might one day be driven to make good his words about this

wonderful machine in course of construction; but if he were, there lay the wheels and racks and drums in the workshop. Of course the manner in which they were to be put together remained his secret. It was not likely he would divulge that until he had secured his patent, and, for aught you could know or should know from him to the contrary, he might have other portions of the machine in course of manufacture for him in other workshops.

When he arrived in town this early day in June he went first to the Blackfriars Road and gave an order for two cog-wheels of peculiar make. He handed in a paper with the specification, paid a bill of a couple of pounds, and then betook himself to the Counter Club.

Here he dined, and from the dinner-table went to the cardroom, which he did not leave until seven o'clock the next morning.

He breakfasted at the club, and after breakfast fell asleep in a chair in the deserted smoking-room, and did not wake for a couple of hours. Then he went out, and, turning into Bond Street, did a little shopping, and got back to Richmond at about noon.

He found his wife in the drawing-room with some fancy work in her hand. After an affectionate greeting, he sat down beside her and took her hand as usual. Contrary to his custom, he had brought no book, or flowers, or basket of fruit.

“And how did you get on in town, William?” she asked, giving no time for him to notice, if he had not already noticed, the omission of his customary little present.

“Very well indeed, Nellie. Better than I could have hoped. Better than I deserved.”

“Not better than you deserved, surely,

dear," she said fondly. "That could not be."

"Well, better than I could have hoped. I am afraid, Nellie, I got on so splendidly that success has turned my head."

She looked at him in surprise and pressed his hand. "I know you better than to think success could turn your head."

"Nevertheless, my success has had such an effect on me that I have not brought you any flowers, or fruit, or a book. Does not that look like being spoiled by success? Should I not be spoiled by prosperity when I forgot you?"

"It does not follow," she said tenderly, as though she were excusing herself, not him, "that because you did not bring me something that you forgot me."

He put his hand in his pocket, took something out of it, and before she knew what he was doing she found a gold brace-

let, having a circle of pearls round a large diamond, clasped upon her arm.

She gave a little cry of wonder and pleasure. "Why, what is this? Where did you get it? Whom is it for?"

"It is for my own wife Nellie. I bought it for her in Bond Street to-day, to show her that I did not forget her when away. And I did not buy it out of the money she lent me yesterday—for, look!" He threw into her lap a lot of gold and notes. "There's the hundred pounds I took with me to town—and look!" He held out towards her more gold and notes. "Here is another hundred I have got over and above what she lent me, and the price of the bracelet."

"Wonder upon wonder!" she cried with a laugh and a simple childlike joy in her husband's success. "Tell me all about the affair. Have you met fairies?"

"No, dear. Only a good angel, and you

are she," he said, and kissed the hand below the gleaming bracelet.

"But I did not give you this. You got this yourself."

"No, you did not give me this money directly, but you gave me the means of getting it."

"But tell me all, dear. I am dying to hear."

"You must know, then, that in designing some machinery for preparing my fibre I hit upon an immense improvement in the scutching machine now in use. I patented my improvement, and sold my patent last evening for two hundred and fifty pounds."

She was overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. This was the first-fruit of his genius, the earnest of his great triumph!

For half-an-hour they sat and chatted, he telling her his schemes for the future, and she listening, full of delight and pride

and love. Then he said he had some writing to do, and went to his room.

The fact was that he could hardly keep his eyes open. It had been a very hot night at the Counter Club, and he had come away the winner of close upon three hundred pounds. He locked the door, drew down the blind, threw himself on a couch, and was fast asleep in a few minutes.

Mrs. Crawford always breakfasted in her own room, and had her other meals brought to her in the drawing-room. She had gradually sunk back almost to the helpless condition in which she had lived so long before the fire. She suffered no pain, but she was nearly as helpless as a year ago. If necessity required it, she could creep about the room by resting her hands on the furniture, but as a rule she went from one place to the other by means of her invalid's chair. She never ventured down-stairs now.

She lived upon the first-floor. Here were her bedroom, the drawing-room, her husband's study—which he called his own room—and the dressing-room where he slept, so as to be within call if she needed assistance in the night.

The doctors told Crawford that his wife was, if anything, rather worse than she had been before the fire, and that any other such shock would in all likelihood kill her.

“Is there no chance of it producing an effect like the former one?” Crawford had asked.

Well, there was no saying for certain. This, however, was sure, that if she sustained another shock and by chance she once more regained the use of her limbs, the relief would be only temporary, and the reaction would leave her in a very critical condition indeed—the chances were ten to one she would die.

A shock, then, was to be avoided at any cost.

With Mrs. Crawford's life all William Crawford's interest in the property would pass away. This property brought in more than Ned Bayliss, or Jim Ford, or Matt Jordan, or any of the other loafers on Welford Bridge imagined. The income was nearer to two than one thousand a year, and Mrs. Crawford's savings exceeded three thousand pounds. These savings would become Crawford's absolute property upon his wife's death. She had practically put them at his disposal already. They were his own, she told him, and he took her word for it. But that was a good reason why he should be moderately careful of them. As long as she lived he had not only these savings at his disposal, but the lion's share of the income as well. If he did not blunder, nothing could take the

savings away from him; if she died he would lose all participation in the fine income.

A shock was to be avoided at any cost.

One morning after breakfast, in the middle of June, Crawford came into the drawing-room, and said to his wife :

“I have slept so badly ! I do not know when I had so little sleep, and the little I got so disturbed.”

She looked at him anxiously. “You are not unwell? You don’t feel anything the matter, do you?”

“O, no ! I am quite well. But I have had such horrid nightmares. What you said to me a fortnight ago about the want of gates on that ice-house all came back to me in sleep last night, and I had the most awful visions of that young Layard drowning in it while I was looking on, unable to stretch out my hand to save him.” He

made a gesture as though to sweep away the spectacle still haunting him.

“I am so sorry, William, I said anything about the place. I am, indeed. I spoke foolishly, no doubt. You are not so superstitious as to fancy anything dreadful has happened?” she asked, losing colour and leaning back in her chair.

“Dear me! No. And I don’t think you spoke foolishly at all. I now see that what you said was quite right. I own it’s very selfish of me, but I do not feel disposed to go through another such night as last. That brought home to me the danger you saw at once, and instinctively.”

She could not help smiling and feeling gratified at these candid and gracious words from so clever a man—from a man who got two hundred and fifty pounds the other day for the pure brain-work of a couple of hours.

“And what do you think of doing?”

“Well, I feel that the surest way to lay the ghost that haunted me last night, and provide against all danger, would be for me to go down to Welford and get these gateways boarded up.”

“Indeed, indeed! I’m sure that would be the best thing to do. When did you fancy you would go?”

“I could go to-day. I am not doing anything particular. Do you want me for anything?”

He asked the question in a soft submissive voice.

“I!” she cried, flushing with pleasure at his deference to her. “Not I, William! I am all right, and feel as well as usual. You could do nothing that would please me more.”

“Very well, then; I’ll go at once. I shall not want more than an hour or so

there. I need not wait to see the thing done. All I shall have to do is to get hold of a carpenter, and put the job into his hands."

And so he set out for Welford.

The fact is he had dreamed last night of Hetty Layard's bright face and wonderful golden hair, and he was getting tired of Richmond and—the house.

It would be very pleasant to go down to Welford, knock at the door, and find Hetty alone. Her brother would be at the gasworks. Philip Ray was in some public office or other, and could not come to make that tow-path horrible with his presence at that hour of the day. He should be able to reach Crawford's House at about eleven, and get away at about one or two. Thus he would run no risks, and he should see again the prettiest girl he had now in his memory.

CHAPTER X.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD'S NIGHTMARE.

"HETTY," said Alfred Layard to his sister at breakfast that same morning, "you know I am not a discontented man."

"Indeed, I know that very well, Alfred. See how you put up with me!"

"Hetty," said he severely, "in this house jokes are *my* prerogative."

"I am not joking in the least, Alfred. I know I am not anything like as good as I ought to be to you. But I'll try to be better in future, Alfred. Indeed I will!"

Her tone was full of sorrow.

"Hetty," said he sternly, "in this house pathos is *my* prerogative also. Mind what

you're about. If you make me laugh or yourself cry you will oblige me to do something I should be extremely loath to do."

"And what is that?" she asked, struggling to repress a smile.

"Hold my tongue. Bad as my loquacity is, my silence would be a thousand times worse. How would you like me to sit at the table and only point at the things I wanted? Suppose there was some one here, how would you like me to make a motion for a slate, and write on it with a squeaking pencil, 'Hetty, your hair is down!' You would not like it a bit. No, Hetty; I was not thinking of you when I said I was not a discontented man. I was thinking of Crawford, our landlord-tenant."

"Of Mr. Crawford! O, what were you thinking of him?"

“I was thinking that I am not too well satisfied with our arrangements about this house. I fancy I am almost sorry I entered into the agreement at all.”

“But why? Surely we are saving money: twenty pounds a year or more by the house, and Mr. Crawford is no trouble, or next to none.”

“He’s very little trouble in the house, I own. But he troubles me in my mind. There is something about the man I don’t like. I can’t tell you for certain what it is, but I think it is because he is a coward.”

“A coward, Alfred! A coward! Good gracious! is it the man who saved Mrs. Crawford from the burning house at the risk of his own life? Don’t you think you are very unjust?”

“Perhaps. But, for goodness’ sake, don’t say anything about Bayard!”

“It was you who called him a Bayard.”

“I don’t think it was; and if it was, I meant it sarcastically. That man is in good bodily health, and yet he is afraid of something or some one. Now, when a man in good bodily health goes about in fear you may be certain he has good cause for being afraid, and you may be equally sure that whatever he is afraid of is not to his credit.”

Layard rose to go. Freddie was in the kitchen with Mrs. Grainger.

“Isn’t a good deal of, or all, this fancy?” asked Hetty, as she too rose.

“It may be fancy that he is afraid of something discreditable; but I am certain he is afraid.”

“How can you tell that?” asked the girl, in incredulous wonder.

“By his eyes and the motion of his

hands. That man could not for a thousand pounds sit in a room the door of which had opened at his back without turning round."

"Upon my word, you are growing quite fanciful, Alfred. And did you notice that he was very much afraid of us?" she said in a bantering tone.

"He is afraid of every one until he is assured of what that person is."

"Of Mrs. Grainger and me, for instance?"

"Yes, he would be afraid of you until he saw your face and discovered who you were."

"Alfred, I never felt so proud in all my life before. To think that a strong man like him should go about shaking in his shoes at sight of me is quite romantic. I must cultivate all kinds of dark and forbidding looks. I feel that I could act

the bravo if I only had a cloak and a dagger and the divided skirt."

"Well, good-morning, Hetty. I am glad you will have no chance of terrifying him for a fortnight, anyway;" and off he went.

"That brother of mine," thought the girl, as she prepared to remove the breakfast-things, "is the very best man in the world. He is the most kind-hearted and generous fellow that ever breathed. But with respect to this Mr. Crawford, he has some strange prejudice which I cannot understand. I never knew him absolutely dislike a man before. He has not gone so far as to say that he absolutely dislikes him, but I feel sure he does."

As soon as the breakfast-things were removed and washed up, it was time to go out on the wharf and hand Freddie to Bramwell. This was now so well-

established a custom that it created little excitement even in Freddie's mind. At about half-past ten Bramwell pushed the floating stage across the bay, went over, said a few words to Hetty, took the boy, and returned with him. Then he hauled the stage back to its moorings on the Ait, put Freddie into the timber-yard, where Frank was already, fastened the gate, and went to his work in his study. At half-past two he restored the boy to Hetty. The Layards breakfasted late, and had not their midday meal till three. For the convenience of the children, Bramwell adopted the same hour for his midday meal.

"Mr. Bramwell," said Hetty that day as she handed the boy to him, "I am sure I do not know how we are to allow this to continue longer. Freddie goes over to you every day, and you will not let Frank

come over to us once even. I am afraid either of us is selfish."

"Selfish? How, selfish?" He smiled as he looked up from the stage into the girl's face.

"Well, we seem to give you all the trouble of these two boys, which makes us seem selfish in one way, and you seem to wish to take all the trouble of them, which is selfish in another way. I am afraid we are both very bad. I give you one more chance," she said, shaking a warning finger at him. "To-morrow I am going to a toy-shop a little bit down the Welford Road, and I intend to take Freddie with me to buy him a Noah's ark in place of the one he lost——"

"The cat flew away with it and ate the elephant and lion," said Freddie.

"And, of course, Freddie can't go over——"

"Not even after dinner?" cried the boy.

"No. Nor must you go over again unless Frank is allowed to come with us to the toy-shop."

"I'll bring him," said the boy confidently. "Frank will come with me. We'll play Frank is a canal boat, and that I'm a horse, and I'll tow him all the way."

"But if his father won't give him leave?" said Hetty.

"O, he'll come!" said Freddie, with decision. "Frank always plays what I ask him. And will you get a Noah's ark for Frank too, Aunt Hetty?"

"Of course. Mr. Bramwell, you will let the child come? You will, won't you? She held both her hands out to him pleadingly.

His eyes were still upon her face. She looked so bright and strong and full of

spirits, it appeared as though the touch of her hand upon his boy must benefit the child. He hesitated for a moment, and said, "Very well, and thank you heartily, Miss Layard," and so the interview ended.

Bramwell carried the boy along the stage and put him into the yard, where Frank was impatiently waiting. Then he came back, drew the stage to its position alongside the islet, and moored it to the ring in the ground. After this he went back to the cottage and buried himself in his work. Unless something unusual occurred in the yard he might count on three and a half uninterrupted hours. From where he sat he could hear the voices of the children at play. If anything went amiss he would be at once apprised by his ears.

As Hetty got into the small back hall from which the door opened on the quay

there was a sound at the front-door. A key had been thrust into the latch and was being turned.

“Alfred coming back for something he has forgotten,” thought Hetty, hurrying to meet him.

The door swung open and Mr. William Crawford pulled out his key, took off his hat, and bowed.

Hetty stepped back with an exclamation of surprise.

“You are surprised to see me, Miss Layard. Of course you are surprised; but I hope you are not displeased?”

He bowed with grave deference to her.

“Displeased?” she said, with a gallant attempt at a smile. “O, dear no! Why should I be displeased? When I heard the key in the door I made sure it was my brother coming back for something he had forgotten; and you know I had no reason

to expect you." She now smiled without effort. She had recovered self-possession. "Will you come in here, or would you prefer going to your own rooms?"

"I do not want to go to my own lair to-day, Miss Layard," he said, as he followed her into their own sitting-room. "In fact, I am here by the merest accident, and I do not know that you will not laugh at me when I tell you why." He thought, "By Jove! what a contrast to some one in Singleton Terrace, Richmond! She is much more lovely than I thought her. I never saw her look so beautiful. Exquisite, exquisite Hetty!"

"Why do you think I shall laugh?" she asked.

"Because I came here owing to a dream I had last night. A most horrible dream! I am not superstitious, but this dream impressed me." Crawford did not act on the

principle that all women are alike. He always considered every woman who interested him as a being the like of whom he had never met before, one requiring special study and special treatment. When he wooed his wife he always kept before him the idea that she was tender and affectionate. Of Hetty he said to himself, "She is imaginative and ardent."

"A dream? It must have been a very remarkable dream that made you come so far."

"Yes ; a most remarkable and unpleasant dream. I thought in my sleep that some one—I knew not whom at first—had wandered out of the house through the door on the Bay by night, and, turning to the left, went near the open door of that flooded ice-house. There are two doorways to the ice-house and no door. I thought I was standing at the further one from this.

The figure drew close to the nearer doorway, and I saw that the wanderer was a somnambulist, and was quite unaware of any danger. I thought I tried to cry out, but could not utter a sound. I thought I tried to rush forward, but could not move. I was half mad with terror, for as the figure drew near me I recognised who it was. The figure kept on until it reached the raised threshold of the ice-house. It stepped upon the sill of the doorway, and all at once I heard a scream and a splash ; and I looked in and saw the figure struggling in the water. I strove with all my might to wrest myself free from the leaden weights that held my feet. The face of the figure was turned up to me, and I could see the golden hair and the lovely cheek and the wonderful blue eyes, and I heard a voice, the sweetest and dearest voice I ever heard, cry out in agony, ‘ Save me ! Save me ! O,

Mr. Crawford, won't you try to save me?' and I wrenched and struggled, and at last I tore myself free, and with a great shout I awoke, terrified and trembling, and in a cold perspiration. And I could not sleep again."

"What a horrible dream!" cried the girl, with blanched face and eyes wide open with dismay.

"It was terrible, indeed. But, Miss Layard, all I have told you was to me nothing compared with what I have yet to tell."

She drew back trembling, and feeling faint.

"Do you know who the drowning person that I could not succour was?"

"No," whispered the girl.

"You."

"I?"

"Yes; you!"

The girl drew back another pace, and shuddered ; she seemed about to faint.

“It was your face I saw, and you were in peril of death ; and I—I was looking on and could not help you. Great heavens ! fancy my finding you in want of aid in my view, and I not able to help you ! All the horrible dreams of my life put together would not equal the anguish, the insupportable agony, of that.”

He took out his handkerchief, breathed heavily—as though the memory of his nightmare was almost as bad as the nightmare itself—and then wiped his forehead laboriously with the handkerchief. After this he sat for a while, leaning back in his chair with a hand resting on each knee, as though to recover himself. In a few seconds he rose with the affectation of an affected briskness, intended to convey that he was struggling against emotions that

overcame him. He said, with a wan smile :

“ So I came straight here to have doors put on those hateful doorways. I knew you would laugh at me.”

“ Indeed, I do not laugh at you ! That dream was enough to upset any one.”

He shook his head, conveying by the shaking of his head and the expression of his face the idea that, great as might be her power of realising his sufferings, they were infinitely greater than she could imagine.

Then he shook the whole of his body to rouse himself out of his lethargy, and establish himself in her mind as a man of action. He begged of her to get him a piece of string, and when she had found him some he asked her to favour him by accompanying him to the ice-house, and aid him in taking measurements for the doors

to block up the yawning death traps, as he called the doorways.

He could not reach the lintel of the doors without something on which to stand. He asked her to hold the string for him till he came back, and went to the kitchen and fetched a chair. He mounted on the chair, and asked her to draw the string taut to the ground, and knot the point at which the string touched the raised threshold.

“There were double doors here once, but single doors will do now,” he said.

When he had completed his measurement he said:

“I shall go from this to the carpenter and leave orders for the doors. I shall come back in a week to see them put up.”

For a few minutes he seemed to fall into a profound reverie, and then, waking up all at once, looked at her with eyes full of

terror, and, pointing into the flooded ice-house, said hoarsely :

“ Hetty, it was in there I saw you drowning ! Do you know what that sight meant to me, girl ? ” He bent close to her ear and answered his own question in a whisper :

“ Madness ! ”

Then, without another word, he hurried away, leaving her amazed, breathless, not knowing what to think of him, and all he had been saying, and not able to think of anything else.



CHAPTER XI.

“MAN OVERBOARD !”

WHEN Hetty recovered from the astonishment into which Mr. William Crawford's words and manner had cast her, the first fact which struck her memory was that he had called her Hetty. That might, no doubt, be excused in a man of his time of life to a girl of hers (she considered his thirty-six years entitled him to be considered quite middle-aged). But she would have felt more comfortable if the question had not been raised at all. It was, she urged in mitigation, to be taken into account that he spoke under great excitement and in haste. But, after all, the thing was not worth a moment's thought.

There was, however, a fact worth considering. This man, sleeping or waking, did seem to have a special care of the lives of others. Had he not rescued his wife from fire?—and here now was this dream, this dreadful dream about the odious old ice-house. No doubt some men were born with a natural taste for encountering risks, but her inclination did not lead her to plunge into burning houses or flooded ice-houses. For her part she would rather run away twenty miles.

And then what were these words he had said about herself? Now that they came back to her they seemed foolish, impertinent, and she ought to have been angry with him for laughing at her. But no; he had not been laughing at her. He could not laugh at anything on earth after having such an awful dream, and no doubt what he had said of herself was only his exagge-

rated way of describing how terribly hard he had wanted to save the drowning woman. But there was no person really drowning, and it would be nonsense not to forget the whole interview with him.

Yet it could hardly be got rid of in that way, for how would Alfred take it? The whole affair was very provoking and horrible, and she felt disposed to cry. Perhaps Alfred was right in his first estimate of Crawford, and he was a little mad.

Yes, clearly the man ought to be in a lunatic asylum, and not allowed to go about the country dreaming and terrifying people.

She had no doubt that in a few minutes a procession of men, carrying planks on their shoulders and bags of tools in their hands, would arrive and make the place unbearable with noise and chips.

Hetty would have made her mind quite

easy on the last score if she could have seen into the mind of William Crawford as he left the door. For he had no more notion of going to any carpenter that day about the job than he had of flinging himself off Welford Bridge into the South London Canal. What he did intend doing was, to come back in a week and say he found the wretched carpenters to whom he had given the order had wholly misunderstood him and botched the job. This would be economical as far as the doors were concerned, and would give him another interview with Hetty.

He had no notion of keeping his promise to his wife either. What could be easier and more pleasant than to enjoy a few hours' freedom in town, and tell her on his return to Richmond that the difficulties to be overcome at the ice-house were much greater than he had anticipated, and that

he had been most grievously delayed against his will.

From a map he had discovered, since his former visit, that he could come or go by water. At the end of one of the Pine Groves lay the Mercantile Pier, and Crawford turned in that direction, resolved to get to town by river.

It pleased him to know that there were two ways of approaching his office, and the line from Crawford's House to the Mercantile Pier was directly away from Camberwell, whereas the route by road was only at right angles to it.

"I think what I said to Hetty must create some effect," he thought, as he walked with brisk footstep and alert body. "It did all I intended anyway. She may, when she gets over her surprise, be either pleased or indignant; but she cannot be indifferent, she is too imaginative for that."

He passed by the Neptune public-house, and entered the Pine Grove leading to the Mercantile Pier. He had no need to ask his way: he carried the map of the place in his head.

Here on either side of him rose the tall black palings. The path between them was only a footway, and wound along sinuously for half a mile between the great docks on either side. The path bent so acutely that it was impossible to see further than a hundred yards before or behind.

To Crawford, who was always expecting to find Philip Ray spring forth, feel a burning sting, hear a report, and know that vengeance had overtaken him at last, this characteristic had one great advantage: it left both his sides protected. He could be approached only from the front or rear.

The place was very secret and retired. There was not a sound beyond the far-off

hum of the city. Spying through the chinks in the palings one could see nothing but broken dark grey ground littered with all kinds of odds and ends of timber and metal objects, looking as dreary and deserted and forlorn as a locked-up and deserted graveyard. Overhead spread the faint blue sky, with the sun behind a dull grey cloud, and above the paling to right and left, and, as it were, rising from hulls lying far off inland, the lofty motionless spars of great ships in the stillness of the upper air.

From the time Crawford entered the Pine Grove until he had got more than half-way through he encountered no one. Then all at once he became aware that he was gradually overtaking a woman who was walking in front, and that footsteps which he had heard for some time behind him were gradually gaining upon him.

With him every unknown woman was an object of curiosity : every unknown man Philip Ray. The woman in front was poorly clad, and walked with lagging step and dejected head. She did not promise to interest him. He turned round. The man was not Philip Ray. Without further thought of either he continued his walk.

Presently the man was level with him, and said, "Beg pardon, sir, but I saw you pass the Neptune, and I thought I'd ask you if you had any odd job hereabout on your property."

Crawford started and looked sharply at the man out of his dark furtive eyes. The speaker he recognised as the man who had acted as his guide, and explained to him the means of Philip Ray's mysterious disappearance from the tow-path.

"No," he said sharply, "I have no job,"

and turned away to show he did not wish to be spoken to again.

“Perhaps, sir, you don’t know the stage is off?”

“What!” cried Crawford, stopping and confronting the man. “What do you mean by the stage being off?” He remembered that Red Jim had told him about the floating stage at Boland’s Ait. Could it be that the floating bridge had been removed, and that Ray’s visits to the islet and its idiotic owner had ceased? or that the owner had taken himself away?

Jim pointed down the Grove. “The stage that goes from the land to the pier had to be taken away for repairs, and you have to get from the shore to the pier in a small boat, and when the tide is low, as it is now, you have to go down a long ladder so as to get to the bed of the river, and from the bed of the river to the small boat;

and people with plenty of money don't care about doing that. So when I saw you turn into the Grove I thought I'd come and tell you, as I felt sure if you knew you wouldn't think of going by boat, and I remembered you gave me two tanners a fortnight ago."

"Then I won't give you anything now," said Crawford sharply, as he resumed his way. His anger had been aroused by the hopes raised and cast down by Red Jim's two speeches about the stage.

"Not as much as a tanner?"

"Not as much as half a farthing. I made a very bad bargain the last time, and this must be given in with what you did before. Besides, this is no use to me, for I intend going by boat all the same. Good-day. If you beg again I shall call the police."

The man abated his pace with a male-

diction, and Crawford went on, Red Jim following him slowly, cursing his own luck.

The delay caused by the dialogue with Red Jim had given the woman a good start, and by the time Crawford reached the head of the ladder the woman was in the act of being handed into the small boat.

When Crawford looked down he was very sorry he had not given Red Jim sixpence for his news and advice, and gone back by land. But it was too late to retrace his steps. He felt a dogged determination not to give Jim anything or be jeered at by him.

Half the descent was easy enough, as it was by rude wooden stairs; but the other half had to be accomplished by means of a broad ladder of very muddy, slippery, and rotten looking steps. The foreshore, too, looked muddy, slimy, uninviting, and here and there was steaming in an unpleasant

manner under the influence of the sun, now shining clearly between vast plains of pale grey clouds.

Crawford hated boats for two reasons. First, he couldn't pull; and, second, he always felt nervous in them, and he could not swim.

However, there was not much time for liking or disliking, for the men in the small boat beckoned him to come on. There were already in the boat the crew of two men, the woman who had preceded him down the lane, and six other women.

With repugnance he descended to the foreshore, and with repugnance and difficulty got into the boat. All the passengers except one were aft.

Crawford took a seat on the starboard side, next to the woman who had preceded him down the Grove.

She took no notice of his coming aboard.

She appeared unconscious of everything round her. She wore a thick black veil, and kept her head bowed upon her chest, giving him the idea that she suffered from some deformity, or disease, or dire calamity. She clasped her elbow in one hand, her arm across her chest, and her other hand across her eyes. The moment she entered the boat she had assumed this posture, and had not moved since.

Her attitude was the result of two causes : her eyes were weak from recent illness, and she was suffering from incurable sorrows.

Her clothes were worn and betokened poverty, her purse penury. Under her thin frayed dress her shoulders bore marks of recent scratches ; under the bosom of her dress her heart bore open wounds of anguish. She was on her way to a free hospital about her eyes.

Disease had lately threatened her life, but

even Death refused to have her. At what she believed to be her last hour she provided for her only child, the apple of her eye, her solitary joy, by placing him in safety, but beyond the power of a recalling cry from her lips. She had then put aside money for her sepulchre.

Death had disdained her, and she was now wandering about alone with the vast world as a tomb and a solitude, and a broken heart and the fate of an outcast, and the undying gnawing remorse for company, with for the sustentation of her living body the money she had devised for its decay. An illness had taken away her voice, which was her bread.

Just as the boat shoved off, Red Jim reached the head of the stairs, and stood there regarding the progress of his patron. He noticed that the ebb tide was running very fast, and that the men kept the boat

heading a little up-stream to make allowance for leeway. He noticed that Crawford was the last passenger on the starboard side, and that, therefore, he would be on the inside when the boat got alongside. "I hope," thought Red Jim, "that there's some nice fresh paint or a nice long nail waiting for him when he's going up the side."

He saw the boat touch the side, and Crawford stagger instantly to his feet. He saw him sway to and fro, and then suddenly fall back against the hulk, boom the boat off with his legs, and drop overboard between the boat and the hulk.

Red Jim uttered a loud shout of triumph, and then began shouting and dancing like mad for joy.

"He'll shoot in under the hulk and be drowned!" cried Red Jim exultingly.

Then an oath:

"That —— woman's got him!"

"Catch him! Hold him!" cried the boatmen. "Hold on for your life or he'll be sucked under!"

The veiled woman had seized the sinking man and thrown herself on her knees—was holding on with all the power of her enfeebled arms.

"Trim the boat! Trim the boat, —— you, or she'll capsize! On deck there!" shouted the boatman to the hulk.

By this time aid had come from the deck, and the submerged man had been seized by the hooks and had hold of a line. Up to this the boatmen had been completely powerless, for all the women had crowded to the starboard side, and bore down the boat's gunwale until it washed level with the water, and if the men attempted to get near the starboard side aft the boat must have gone over at once.

And now the passengers went on board the hulk.

When the woman who had saved him was relieved of his weight, she gave a loud cry, and fell back fainting in the boat.



CHAPTER XII.

REWARD FOR A LIFE.

Two men came down from deck and carried the fainting woman up, and brought her into the pier-master's little room, and left her to the kindly offices of some sympathetic women; while the two boatmen dragged the half-stunned, half-drowned Crawford out of the river over the stern of the boat, and then, after allowing some of the water to run out of his clothes, helped him up the accommodation-ladder to the deck of the hulk.

Here men squeezed his clothes and rubbed him down, and told him how thankful he ought to be that he had not been drowned, as he was within an ace of being

drawn under the hulk, and if once that had happened his chance of ever seeing daylight again would have been small indeed. Was he a good swimmer?

No, he could not swim a yard.

Well, then, he had better for the future keep out of the water. Yes, of course he had lost his hat; but a sou'-wester of the pierman's was at his service temporarily. No? He wouldn't have it? Very well. Better any day lose one's hat than one's life. He was very wet indeed; but, then, when a man has been in the river one must expect to turn out wet upon fetching port.

Why had his position been so very dangerous? Was it more dangerous than that of a man falling overboard under ordinary circumstances?

A thousand times. For he had fallen against the hulk and boomed off the boat, and in booming her off his back had slid

down the side of the hulk until his heels were higher than his head, and as he left the boat his heels, driven by the force of the tide on the sheer of the boat, would thrust him inward and downwards and so under the bottom of the hulk, and then good-bye to him, particularly as he could not swim.

And how then came he to be saved?

Why, by the woman laying hold of him just as he slipped out, and sticking to him ; for, owing to the list to starboard the passengers gave the boat, the boatmen durst not move, or she'd capsize for certain.

The woman laying hold of him ? It was all dark to him.

Of course it was all dark to him, and a good job it had ever come light to him again. Why, the woman who had sat beside him ! A poor sorrowful-looking creature, who wore a veil and kept her hands across her eyes.

He had noticed her. And where was she now?

In the master's room in a dead faint. She had fainted the moment they told her she might let him go. She looked a poor soul that had had her troubles, and if he thought well of doing such a thing, perhaps he might do worse than give her a trifle by way of reward.

A trifle! A trifle for saving his life! He could and he would reward her most handsomely. Had she recovered yet?

It was believed not. And now they had squeezed all they could out of him—unless he'd like to give them something for their trouble, for they had to go back at once.

He handed a wet and clammy five-pound note to be divided as they thought best among themselves.

He was generous, for had not a great life been at stake?

Was he going ashore, or going on? He had better get dry clothes.

He should stay until that woman was well enough to receive the reward for the great services she had rendered him.

The boatmen descended the accommodation-ladder, and Crawford, partly to keep off a chill and partly to prevent the people on the pier from accosting him, began walking up and down the deck at a brisk rate.

He had two reasons for not going to Welford for dry clothes. First, he did not wish to weaken the effect of his visit and words of that morning by so early a reappearance; and second, he did not care to present himself to Hetty in his miserable and undignified plight.

When he had money he liked carrying large sums about with him, for he never

felt so sure of the possession of it as when he could tap a pocket-book containing a sheaf of notes.

He made up his mind to give this woman fifty pounds, for had she not done him the greatest service any man, woman or child ever performed towards him? had she not saved his life, and was she not worthy of the highest reward he could pay? He had no more than fifty pounds and some broken money.

In a few minutes the pier-master, who had heard him speak of the reward, came and said the poor woman had fully recovered, and asked if Crawford would wish to see her.

“By all means. I must get these wet clothes off as soon as possible. When is the next boat up?”

“In about five or ten minutes.” The pier-master moved off, and returned im-

mediately to say the woman was ready and willing to receive him. Adding, "It's a kind of thing we'd like to see done, as we saw her save your life, and know you are open-handed and have a good heart; but she says she'd rather there was only you two."

"Alone!" said Crawford in a tone of surprise. "It is a kind of thing generally done openly. Did you tell her I wished to give her a reward?"

"Yes, sir. She said you would know before you left her why she preferred no one should be present."

"Well," said Crawford, who felt that this was an attempt to keep the generosity of his gift from the eyes of others, "I am going to give her these five tenners." He held out the notes in his hand and turned them over, and then, still keeping them in his hand lest some one might sus-

pect a trick, stepped into the pier-master's private room or cabin.

It was a very tiny room, with a small table in the middle, a writing-table in one of the two windows, and three chairs. There seemed to be no space for moving about. Even if the chairs were out of the way, two people could not walk abreast round the centre table.

Standing with her back to the second window Crawford found the woman who had saved his life less than half-an-hour ago. Her veil, which had been disarranged in the struggle, was now close drawn.

With the notes in one hand and holding out the other to grasp hers in his gratitude, he was about to advance, when she held up her hand and said in a hoarse dull voice, "No nearer. I have been very ill. It is safer our hands should not meet."

He sprang back as far as the walls would allow. He had the most intense horror of contagious diseases. He was now in the most fervent haste to bring the interview to an end. He would freely have given another fifty to be out of that room.

“I merely wished to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the noble manner in which you snatched my life from death, to offer you this fifty pounds as a small token of the esteem in which I hold the services you have rendered me;” he shook the notes, but did not advance his hand any nearer to the centre of contagion; “and to say that my everlasting gratitude must be yours.” He could always make a little speech.

“There was a time,” she said in her peculiar hoarse, dull voice, “when I should have been very glad to take those fifty

pounds—ay, as many shillings—from you, but I cannot take them now.”

“There was a time!” said he, surprised, and interested notwithstanding his fear of disease; “surely I could not have had the privilege of offering them to you longer ago than an hour.”

“You could,” she said, “and you ought.”

“May I ask,” said he, fairly carried away by curiosity, “if the disease of which you speak was of a nervous character.”

“You mean, was my mind affected?”

“Yes, if you choose to put it that way?”

“It was, but unfortunately I have not been in any asylum; even the grave that they told me was gaping for me closed of its own accord. It was the last door open to me, and it is shut now.”

“But if your disease was mental, I cannot understand why we might not shake hands;

why I might not shake the hand of my rescuer."

"Because she could not touch yours. It is in *your* hand the contamination lies."

"Poor creature!" he thought, "mad!—quite mad! To say such a thing of me, who am never ill—of the soundest man in London! I, who take such care not to be ill!" He laughed one of his short sharp laughs, and said aloud, "Contagion in my hand! And who am I?"

"I do not know who you are *now*." At the emphasised word he sprang into the air off the ground as though he had been shot, and then took a pace towards her, and paused and looked furtively at the door. Was she, too, armed?

She also took a pace forward. They were not now two yards apart. With a scornful gesture she tore the veil from before her face

and, looking into his, cried, "And who am *I*?"

The face was haggard and blotched.

He sprang back against the wall, crying:

"Good heavens, Kate, this is not you!"

"Yes, this is Kate. I saved your life to-day, and you offer me fifty pounds. How glad I should have been to get as many shillings when you left me and my child to starve in America! I saved your life to-day, and you offer me a reward. I will take it——"

He held out the notes to her.

She pushed his hand aside with a laugh.

"The reward I want you to give me cannot be bought for money—not even for your splendid fifty pounds. I saved your life to-day; give me for reward my husband and my child, and my innocence. It is a fair demand. You cannot give me less, John Ainsworth."

She thrust her hand suddenly into her pocket.

“She is armed!” he cried, and, bursting from the room, he leaped aboard a steamer then a foot from the pier on its way up to London.

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